

## **Appendix H**

### **Alternatives Development**



## Appendix H Development of the Alternatives

The development of alternatives did not begin until after the Initial Scoping Meeting.

### **Initial Scoping Meeting on July 11, 2001, and Optional Field Visit on July 12, 2001**

The Initial Scoping Meeting was held at Clarksdale High School during the afternoon, and the optional field visit was taken the following day. Eighty-nine (89) people registered their attendance at the meeting, and twenty-one (21) people attended all or a portion of the field visit. The goals of the Scoping Meeting and Optional Field Visit were to solicit views from Federal, State, and local agencies – as well as private organization or groups – which by law, interest, or expertise could assist the project planners with the timely identification of economic, social, and environmental opportunities and constraints within the study area. The input received from those attending this meeting and field visit was used to assist the project planners in developing the evaluating the one-mile wide Preliminary Corridor Alternatives for presentation at the Initial Series of Public Meetings. The minutes for this meeting are contained in the **Appendix**.

Displays used to supplement presentations given at the Scoping Meeting included:

- I-69 Typical Section;
- Aerial Photography Map of the Study Area;
- Percent Minority Population Map of the Study Area;
- Median Household Income Map of the Study Area; and,
- An Environmental Consequences Map of the Study Area.

The Environmental Consequences Map of the Study Area utilized Geographical Information Systems (GIS) databases, other desktop resources, and supplements from other agencies to identify known natural and human environmental features such as National Register Sites; Historic Structures; Archaeological Sites; Environmentally Sensitive Areas; Underground Storage Tanks; EPA Regulated Facilities; RCRA Sites; CERCLA Sites; Toxic Release Inventory Sites; Discharge Elimination Sites; Dams; Airports; Electric Transmission Lines; Natural Gas Pipelines; Active Railroads; Abandoned Railroads; County Roads; Primary Roads; Secondary Roads; Intermittent Streams; Perennial Streams; Historic Areas; State Parks; National Wildlife Refuges; Cities; Water Bodies; State Penitentiary; and Areas of 100 Year Floodplain.

The following things learned from discussions at the Scoping Meeting aided the project team in developing the one-mile wide Preliminary Alternative Corridors for presentation at the Initial Series of Public Meetings.

- A minimum of three alternatives will be considered.
- The eastern boundary of the study area will not be extended east of the State Penal Farm in the development of alternatives.
- I-69 should be placed near cities and towns to allow areas a stronger chance for economic development.

The following things learned from the field visit aided the project team in developing the one-mile wide Preliminary Alternative Corridors for presentation at the Initial Series of Public Meetings.

- Using the four-lane section of US 61, from between Renova and Merigold in Bolivar County to Clarksdale in Coahoma County, appeared to be an alternative.
- The built-up area of the City of Cleveland in Bolivar County extends east along SR 8 to near the Sunflower County Line and west along SR 8 to the turnoff to Bayou Academy.
- The industrial park, port, and state park near the SR 8 intersection with SR 1 at Rosedale in Bolivar County are obvious constraints. Due to these constraints and the build-up along SR 8 east of the SR 1 intersection, it appeared the western limits of any alternative for I-69 near Rosedale should be east of Rosedale.
- The Mississippi River is located just west of the Town of Beulah in Bolivar County. Any alternative that is developed along SR 1 impacts the Town of Beulah, and the alternative should pass to the east of the Town.
- SR 446 in Bolivar County connects SR 1 with US 61, and SR 446 passes through the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge between SR 1 and the Community of Skene. The Refuge is an environmentally sensitive constraint.
- Some of the SR 1 crossing points in Bolivar County for the adjacent I-69 study on SIU 12 at and near Benoit were observed. It was recognized that some overlap west onto the SIU 12 study might be needed to complete the SIU 11 study.
- A crop dusting airstrip, located in Bolivar County on Litton Road east of Benoit, was observed as a constraint.
- The built-up limits of the Community of Skene were observed as possible constraints for developing alternatives.
- In the northern portion of the study area near the City of Tunica and Tunica County, a minority community was located east of US 61 and north of SR 4.
- The expansion of Tunica Airport, which was under construction east of US 61, was observed as a constraint.
- The location of the old Tunica County Landfill, which is east of US 61 and north of SR 4, was observed. This landfill is closed, and it is a constraint.
- The location of the new landfill for Tunica County Landfill, which is a constraint located on Counce Road at the SR 3 intersection, was observed.
- In Tunica County at Robinsonville, the build-up was observed along US 61 between the SR 304 intersection and the new SR 304 Interchange to the north with US 61. This build-up is associated with the Casino Gaming Industry whose casinos are located along the Mississippi River west of US 61. There is also build-up associated with the casinos between US 61 and the Mississippi River. The section of SR 304 under construction between I-55 at Hernando and US 61 has been designated as SIU 10 of I-69. As a means of possibly connecting SIU 10 of I-69 with SIU 11, an interstate spur connection was provided east of SR 3 between the section of SR 304 under construction and the existing section of SR 304. Due to the constraints along and west of US 61 between the SR 304 intersection with US 61 and the SR 304 interchange with US 61, the spur connection to SR 304 was selected as the northern termini of the SIU 11 Study from Benoit to Robinsonville. The short distance between the intersections of existing SR 304 with the spur, the railroad, and SR 3 are constraints for connecting the SIU 11 alternatives with the spur.



The following things learned from comments, which were hand-delivered to the project team at the meeting or mailed to the project team in response to the Scoping Meeting and Field Visit, aided the project team in developing the one-mile wide Preliminary Alternative Corridors for presentation at the Initial Series of Public Meetings.

- Keep the south section of this section of I-69 as far south and east as possible to better serve the larger populated areas.
- Carefully examine the merits of an I-69 alignment east of Cleveland and south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge.
- Use the US 61 Clarksdale Bypass for I-69 in Coahoma County and use the four-lane section of US 61 north and south of Clarksdale as much as possible for I-69.

**Noteworthy actions in Alternative Development between the Initial Scoping Meeting in July of 2001 and the presentation of one-mile wide Preliminary Alternative Corridors at the Initial Series of Public Meetings on September 24-27, 2001**

- The Sunflower County Board of Supervisors passed a Resolution dated July 16, 2001. The Resolution supported the I-69 river crossing at Eutaw Landing in the Benoit area, and further urged the MDOT and FHWA to carefully examine the merits of an I-69 route which would run east of Cleveland, Mississippi, and south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge.
- Geographic Information System (GIS) environmental data was obtained from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and referenced into the project team's base mapping.
- The project team held an internal meeting to discuss the operating procedures of the Environmental Justice Task Force on August 2, 2001.
- A Scoping Meeting with the Native Americans was scheduled at the Headquarters of Delta Council in Stoneville on August 22, 2001. The Jackson Division Office of the FHWA mailed invitations to the appropriate Tribal representatives, but none of the Native Americans attended the meeting.
- The one-mile wide Preliminary Alternative Corridors, shown on Figure 2-1 were developed for presentation at the Initial Series of Public Meetings. The following are some of the factors considered when developing these initial alternative corridors.
  - ❖ Utilizing information received in response to the Initial Scoping Meeting, the base mapping, and known environmental opportunities and constraints, a number of possible one-mile wide alternative segments, which could be connected in various combinations to become alternative corridors, were developed.
  - ❖ The approach was to present as many short segments as appeared remotely possible and practical to the public for input at the initial series of public meetings, and allow the public to assist in reducing the number of alternatives that would be studied in more detail.
  - ❖ The project team recognized the public still might suggest other alternatives at the initial series of public meetings which would justify further study.
  - ❖ Known human and natural environmental constraints were avoided as much as possible, but when avoidance was not possible the corridors were developed to pass near the outside limits of these constraints rather than bisecting them.
  - ❖ Efforts were made to cross major streams at good angles in anticipation of having bridges at those locations.

- ❖ Efforts were made to cross county roads and highways at good angles in anticipation of having either grade separation bridges or interchanges at these locations.
- ❖ A mile-mile width was selected for most of the corridors to allow flexibility for narrowing the chosen corridors as the study progressed.
- ❖ Corridors more than one mile wide were used in the vicinity of SR 1 at Benoit and south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge to allow flexibility for connecting to the adjacent I-69 Study to the west on SIU 12.
- An Environmental Screening Analysis, which is shown on Table 2-2, was conducted for the segments. Certain combinations of these segments could be joined to develop an alternative corridor.

### **First Series of Public Meetings held on September 24-27, 2001**

Four identical public meetings were held on successive evenings in the Benoit, Cleveland, Clarksdale, and Tunica areas respectively. Thirty-eight (38) people registered their attendance at the Benoit Meeting, 51 at the Cleveland Meeting, 48 at the Clarksdale Meeting, and 74 at the Tunica Meeting. The **Appendix** contains the minutes for the First Series of Public Meetings. The following things learned from discussions and comments received in response to the First Series of Public Meetings aided the project team in deciding on the alternatives corridors that should be eliminated and those that should be refined for further study.

- Landowners, who could have their farmland divided by I-69 alternative segments, were very concerned about how they would access property divided by the interstate. Owners of farmland, or farmers who are renting land from others, want alternative segments relocated to not impact them or they want disruptions to their farming operations minimized as alternative segments are taken forward for further study.
- There were some people who believed the alternative segments utilizing the SR 1 corridor should be eliminated. The people who made this request in the Bolivar County portion of the study had this belief because Segment B3, located in Bolivar County between Benoit and Rosedale, is in the path of a planned westward expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge across SR 1 to the Mississippi River. If Segment B3 were eliminated, then the connecting segments of B6 and B7 would have to be eliminated or modified to connect with the B4 Segment north and east of the Refuge. The people who made this request in the Coahoma County portion of the study had this belief because the C4 and C8 connecting segments in Coahoma County do not use the Clarksdale Bypass and pass through a very narrow environmental corridor between Moon Lake and the Mississippi River Levee in northwest Coahoma County. The people who made this request in the Tunica County portion of the study had this belief because the gaming industry development at Robinsonville is located between the Mississippi River and US 61, while the airport and the industrial zoning for Tunica County projected growth path is east and north of the City of Tunica.
- A new segment was recommended in the Southern Section of the study area that would connect B2, south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge, with either C8 at the Clarksdale Bypass or C7. This additional segment would be on new location between Cleveland in Bolivar County and Clarksdale in Coahoma County.

**Noteworthy actions in Alternative Development between the Initial Series of Public Meetings of September 2001 and the Agency Scoping Meeting on April 2, 2002**

- The project team held a Steering Committee Meeting on October 4, 2001. In response to a request made at the Initial Series of Public Meetings, it was decided to pursue adding the requested eastern alternative segment on new location in the Southern Section from SR 8 east of Cleveland in Bolivar County to Clarksdale in Coahoma County. The consultant team was asked to evaluate a number of the alternative segments presented at the Initial Series of Public Meetings in more detail in regards to constructability and environmental impacts. The consultant team was advised to begin the process of developing alternative alignments for a reduced number of alternative segments based on input received at the Initial Public Meetings and further review of the constructability and environmental constraints. It was agreed the consultant team would use 1,000 feet for the width of the alternative segments taken forward for further study. The first discussions on conducting an economic study comparing benefits of economic corridors were held at this meeting.
- Representative of Neel-Schaffer made a field visit to view the alternative corridors on October 23-24, 2001. During their field visit, they noted the following.
  - ❖ For the B5 Segment at the crossing of Linn Road south of Boyle, there is a tower, church, and cemetery located within the existing one-mile corridor. The portion of the B5 Segment from Linn Road to Merigold was reviewed on a previous trip and appears to be an acceptable corridor.
  - ❖ For the B4 Segment from Dahomey to Merigold, several things were noted. There appears to be an acceptable crossing of SR 446 to the east of the crossroad county road intersection located approximately one mile west of Skene. Proceeding to the northeast, this segment appears to need to cross SR 8 at the first crossroad intersection east of the County Penal Farm. Continuing to the north and east, this segment needs to remain to the east of the pipeline before intersecting the new, four-lane section of US 61 southwest of Merigold.
  - ❖ Should the B4 Segment have some fatal flaws between the power plant and Merigold, we looked into the possibility of modifying the segment to connect to US 61 just south of the power plant in the vicinity of McKnight Road. It was decided to determine if this alignment could be developed to meet the design criteria and be more favorable than the other corridor under consideration.
  - ❖ The C1 Segment and the C3 Segment are viable segments to go west of the Clarksdale Country Club and connect to the Bypass. The railroad has been abandoned in this segment, and the negative impacts could be avoided.
  - ❖ The C2 Segment is a viable segment, but it would have to be constructed to east of existing US 61 between the Bobo community and Clarksdale to avoid the build-up along this section of US 61. By constructing the segment to the east of US 61 on new location, the Natural Gas Pipeline Substation, Clarksdale Country Club, and the American Legion building could be avoided.
  - ❖ The C4 Segment is a viable segment from the intersection of the C2 and C1 segments to SR 1 in the vicinity of Friars Point. Adjacent to SR 1 between the Ferrell and Stovall communities, it appears the west side is a

more favorable location for I-69 than the east. However, between Stovall and Friars Point, it appears the east side of SR 1 is more favorable. These favored sides along SR 1 are due to the locations of the churches, residences, and the towns or communities.

- ❖ The C4 Segment does not appear to be a viable segment along SR 1 at Moon Lake. This is because of the short distance between the levee and the lake, and the wetland and habitat issues appear extensive in this area. There is a possibility that a connection could be made from SR 1 just north of Friars Point using a corridor south of Long Lake, south of Moon Lake, north of Hull Brake, over the railroad to connect to US 61 just south of US 49. If this connection can be developed without any fatal flaws, it was believed this is where the western relocation alternative from Benoit should first connect to US 61.
- ❖ The C10 Segment has a couple of areas of concern. First, the Barbee Cemetery is located adjacent to US 61 on the east side just north of US 49. Another concern is the railroad grade crossing of US 61 approximately 1,500 feet north of the cemetery.
- ❖ The T2 Segment is a viable segment.
- ❖ The T7 Segment and the T 11 Segment are viable segments.
- ❖ The T 15 Segment might have too many impacts just north of its crossing of Jack Lake Bayou. Should this be the case, it may be possible to connect a segment from T15 at Jack Lake Bayou in a north and east direction to T16.
- ❖ The T9 – T14 – T12 – T17 segments appear to be a viable alternative for bypassing Tunica to the west. A combination of the segments farther west does not make any sense since the most western alignment on relocation in the Tunica area was omitted. There does appear to be some problems with the T9 and T17 segments of the T9 – T14 – T12 – T 17 combination of segments. The T9 Segment will negatively impact the industrial park area in the vicinity of the SR 4 East intersection. The T17 Segment can only be located in a narrow corridor to avoid negative impacts caused by commercial and residential development. Segment T6 appears to be a viable alternative should a western bypass of Tunica need to be considered. There is a tower on the east side of US 61 approximately one mile south of the junction of the T9 and T10 segments.
- ❖ Segment T3 – C7 appears to be a viable alternative at this time.
- The project team held a Steering Committee Meeting on November 16, 2001. At that meeting, it was decided the consultant team would identify known wetland areas within the study area that provide good potential for mitigation. The Economic Study was discussed in more detail, and it was decided the consultant team would prepare a supplemental agreement for the additional work.
- A representative from Neel-Schaffer made another field visit on December 26-28, 2001, to review the preliminary 1000 feet wide alternatives in Bolivar County for any needed adjustments. **Refer to map or figure.**
- Kimley-Horn furnished Neel-Schaffer the following comments on the Bolivar County alternative corridors on January 9, 2002.
  - ❖ The piece coming from Route 1 south of Benoit and then extending north doesn't make sense. It seems like if we're going to be on the western side

of the county, we should start at the northern or middle terminus of the Great River Bridge project.

- ❖ A National Register historic site exists south of Benoit. Two of the lines impact it or pass very close to it.
- ❖ We need to be aware of potential expansion of Dahomey to the west.
- ❖ The alignment that crosses the gas pipeline twice south of Skene should be realigned to stay west of the pipeline.
- ❖ There should be an interchange at Route 446 with both western alternatives. (The farthest west would need a short extension of 446.)
- ❖ Still on the west side, two interchanges at Beulah seem like too much.
- ❖ The interchange at Route 32 north of Gunnison appears to be at a stream and floodplain, and also could impact national register archaeological site.
- ❖ There should be an interchange at Route 444.
- ❖ The western alignment north of Route 444 appears to go through a pond.
- Kimley-Horn furnished Neel-Schaffer the following comments on the Coahoma County alternative corridors on January 9, 2002.
  - ❖ Western corridor just north of Bolivar County passes through floodplain and archaeological site near stream crossing.
  - ❖ The alignment just west of US 61 south of Clarksdale appears to be new. Is there a lot of development in that area?
  - ❖ Western corridor impacts archaeological, historic areas near Stovall and Friars Point. Interchange location south of Friars Point doesn't have major road. Are we proposing new spur?
  - ❖ Far eastern corridor east of Clarksdale passes through large floodplain area, has interchange at stream/floodplain area.
  - ❖ Section west of Moon Lake may have environmental problems (wetlands, wildlife corridor). Also crosses large pond near National Register sites west of Moon Lake.
  - ❖ Section east of Jonestown crosses or comes near creek at a bend.
  - ❖ Corridor along US 61 south of Rich should have interchange with US 49. One of the interchanges near Rich appears to be an error. Is Bypass needed in this area? It crosses gas pipeline twice and also crosses RR.
  - ❖ Western corridor north of US 49 just south of Tunica County appears to be on stream.
- Kimley-Horn furnished Neel-Schaffer the following comments on the Tunica County alternative corridors on January 9, 2002.
  - ❖ Western corridor west of Beaverdam Lake has environmental problems, as observed in the field, also appears to impact large catfish ponds. See notes on map regarding alignments east of lake, to provide more connections between alternatives.
  - ❖ Near eastern corridor north of Dundee should stay west of gas pipeline. See notes for connection from far east to near east.
  - ❖ Near west line may impact archaeological sites just west of Tunica.
  - ❖ Near east line southwest of Tunica may impact toxic release site (treatment plant?).
  - ❖ Near west line north of Tunica abuts stream.
  - ❖ Near east line north of Tunica has extra alignment. It looks like eastern one is better. Consider an interchange as indicated on map to provide

additional east-west access. Line just north of that may impact stream and pond.

- To review the comments by Kimley-Horn and take the appropriate action to refine the alternatives, another field visit of the remaining alternative corridors in Bolivar County, and the alternative corridors in Coahoma and Tunica Counties was made by Neel-Schaffer on January 9-11, 2002.
- In response to the actions taken by Neel-Schaffer, Kimley-Horn advised the corridors looked good, and the major changes have been made. Kimley-Horn expressed concern that the corridors to the west looked bad in northern Coahoma and southern Tunica Counties, but they also advised this was already known and the corridors would be shown to quantify the impacts. At the south terminus, Kimley-Horn suggested carrying the corridors back to the common point on the GRB project so that the analyses in that area compare "apples with apples", but Kimley-Horn also stated this can really be done in the next stage after we've eliminated most of these alternatives and have real "feasible and reasonable" corridors to work with.
- For the MDOT meetings on February 12 and 13, 2002, the project team finalized its work of refining the alternatives to widths of 1,000 feet; selecting interchange locations for the alternative corridors undergoing refinement, and verifying alternative corridors would not have any major construction problems that merited eliminating an alternative from consideration.
- The project team held a Steering Committee Meeting on February 12, 2002. Information identifying the current alignment segments undergoing study and the findings on the 1,000 foot wide screening analysis on those segments. It was agreed some minor changes and additions to the screening analysis were needed prior to presenting the information at future meetings. The end of May or the first part of June was given as the estimated time for completing the Economic Study. The four-laning of SR 8 in Bolivar County between Rosedale and Cleveland is in the MDOT's Vision 21 Program; SIU 11 of I-69 has an economic development charge associated with the Delta Initiative; and, the Port of Rosedale presents a possible intermodal connection component to this project on I-69. For these reasons, the consultant team was advised to add the four-laning of SR 8 to its study of this section of I-69.
- An update meeting with MDOT Central Office and District personnel was held on February 13, 2002. After receiving the update, the representatives of the Second and Third districts requested other alternative segments to be added to the study. One of the additional segments was a far-east alternative around Clarksdale that would not use the Bypass. To the north and south, the requested far-east alternative would connect with segments that were recommended for further study. Another requested additional segment would bypass Clarksdale to the west. That requested additional segment would cross SR 322 at the same location as the current far-west segment, but north of SR 322 it would turn northeast crossing US 61 north of the Clarksdale Airport before intersecting the far-east alternative segment between Jonestown and Rich. The final additional alternative segment requested by the districts would result in a connecting segment from SR 1 at Friars Point which would join the far-east alternative segment near the Tunica-Coahoma County Line. The consultant team was advised to develop feasible additional alternative segments to comply with the districts requests.
- In response to the meetings on February 13, 2002, a field visit was made on February 15, 2002. As a result of the field visit and other alternative refinement work, the following changes were made in the alternative segments. **Refer to and show map as Figure.**

- ❖ Segment B11 in Bolivar County – Moved radius southeast at catfish ponds to move corridor away from church and cemetery and into ponds to get road over interstate.
- ❖ Segment B19 in Bolivar County – South of Beulah and northwest of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge, corridor was getting into a church and cemetery. Put in additional tangent with curves at south and north end respectively to avoid the church and cemetery.
- ❖ Segment B17 in Bolivar County – Consolidated north and south of SR 8 east of Cleveland.
- ❖ Segment B26 in Bolivar County – Moved to west around Harris Bayou and east of Duncan to avoid church and cemetery.
- ❖ Bolivar County – Added a 300 foot wide corridor centered on SR 8 from SR 1 at Rosedale to the intersection of SR 8 and South Bishop Road west of Cleveland.
- ❖ Bolivar County – Extended all 1000 feet corridors to west of interchanges on/adjacent to SR 1 at Benoit to a common starting point.
- ❖ Segment C3, C4, C5, and C6 in Coahoma County – Modified corridors to miss church and created additional line to connect C3 with C5.
- ❖ Bolivar and Coahoma counties – Created new segment from B25 near Winstonville to C13 south of Jonestown and added interchange location along this segment at Hwys 49, 322, and 6.
- ❖ Segment C5 in Coahoma County – Adjusted to the north to miss church.
- ❖ Segment C10 in Coahoma County – Moved interchange at Hwy 322 to the west to miss the radio tower and church.
- ❖ Coahoma County – Created new segment from C10 northwest of Clarksdale and added interchange at Hwy 61.
- ❖ Segment C12 in Coahoma County – Moved interchange at Hwy 316 to the north to miss church and cemetery.
- ❖ Segments C14, C15, C19 in Coahoma County – Adjusted lines and interchanges in this area to attempt avoiding cemeteries, a church, and a tower at the Hwy 49 intersection.
- ❖ Segments C12 and C13 in Coahoma County – Moved interchange to the southwest on the south side of these two segments.
- ❖ Segment T4 in Tunica County – Moved line slightly to the southeast in the area of the airstrip.
- ❖ Segment T28 in Tunica County – Moved segment to miss church and cemetery and realigned area in Segments T10, T11, T25, T26, T27, and T28 to avoid church, school, and cemetery.
- ❖ Segment T12 in Tunica County – Moved interchange to the north at T12 and Hwy 4 to avoid a cemetery, church, and airstrip.
- ❖ Segment T12 in Tunica County – Moved interchange to the southwest on Hwy 61 to avoid a new school.
- ❖ Segment T21 in Tunica County – Moved the interchange to the south to avoid a church and cemetery along a new drainage area.
- ❖ Segments C11 and T4 in Coahoma and Tunica counties – Created new segment from C11 at the Hwy 61/49 intersection to T4.
- ❖ Segment T18 in Tunica County – Moved interchange at Hwy 61 to avoid a cemetery.

- ❖ Segment T18 in Tunica County – Adjusted to miss cemetery on north side of Segment near T20.

### **Agency Scoping Meeting on April 2, 2002**

An Agency Scoping Meeting was held in the MDOT Auditorium on April 2, 2002. The meeting's purpose was to update the Cooperating Agencies, as well as other key governmental agencies, on the status of the project and to obtain the agencies input of the alternative alignment segments being studied. Although none attended, the Native American tribal representatives were also invited to the meeting. There were 31 people who registered their attendance at the meeting, and the minutes for the meeting are contained in the **Appendix**. Figure 2-2 identifies the Refined Alternative Corridors presented at this meeting for further study, and Table 2-3 provides a Summary of the Impacts on these Refined 1,000 Feet Wide Alternative Corridors. The following were issues the agency attendees expressed concerning the alternative corridors presented for further study.

- Because of the planned westward expansion of the Dahomey National Refuge and the natural environmental corridor that exists between the Mississippi River and the Refuge, several agency representatives expressed concern about any alternative corridor between the River and the Refuge.
- Because of the number of agricultural easements within the study area, such as Wetland Reserve Program Sites, it was recognized that alternatives would impact some of the easements. These easements should be avoided, or if not possible the impacts to easements should be minimized, when developing and refining the alternatives. The consultant team was given the name of a contact person, who could assist them with identifying the location of these easements and the type of easements that exists at each location.
- The overall bisecting of the Delta, in areas where restoration is being used or could be used to connect natural environmental areas, is a concern.
- Pondberry is an endangered species located within the study area. It should be identified and avoided where possible.
- Use US 61 or stay as far east as possible to avoid bisecting of natural environmental areas.
- More information on the quality of wetlands is needed.
- More information on stream impacts is needed.
- What about noise impacts for alternates to the southeast near subdivisions and information on social impacts?
- Floodplain and Prime Farmland impacts need examining.
- Spanning of perennial streams needs to be long enough to not impede flow. Alternatives need to cross streams as close as possible to perpendicular.
- More archaeological issues will probably be encountered with the alternatives closest to the Mississippi River.
- A western option has merit because it would draw on the economic development potential of the Mississippi River.
- Using US 61 for I-69 would probably be the most expensive alternative.
- Maintaining traffic during construction would be very important if US 61 is used for I-69.



- The document should identify an environmentally Preferred Alternative, address the secondary impacts associated with the connectors, and the impacts associated with reasonable anticipated development.
- The adjacent study on SIU 12 between McGehee, AR and Benoit is ahead of this study on SIU 11. Coordination and some overlap will be required for the two studies.
- Tourism attractions and access to recreational facilities should be considered when developing alternatives.
- Work to assess wetlands and perform Phase I Archaeological Studies will begin the following week.

### **Steering Committee Meeting on May 6, 2002**

This meeting was held at the Ridgeland Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a written response the Service made to the Agency Scoping Meeting held on April 2, 2002. Those present at this meeting included representatives from the Service and the project team. A copy of the minutes for the meeting is contained in the **Appendix**. The following issues were discussed concerning any Bolivar County alternatives in the Southern Section that pass south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge.

- The Alternative B corridor will be moved south of Litton Road so it would not interfere with a southern expansion of the Refuge to Litton Road.
- Any alternative developed in the future that passes to the south of the Refuge will be kept south of Litton Road.
- The Service loaned the consultant team mapping of the study area counties. The maps had an aerial photography background and the maps identified features including lakes and rivers, private Ducks Unlimited agricultural easements, Farm Service Administration agricultural easements, and Wetland Reserve Program Sites. The information was made available electronically to the consulting team for referencing into the base mapping.

### **MDOT/FHWA Meeting on May 8, 2002**

A MDOT/FHWA Meeting was held in the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room of the MDOT Building in Jackson on May 8, 2002. The meeting's purpose was to update the MDOT and FHWA on the status of the project and to obtain approval from these two agencies on the alternative alignments recommended for further study. Input from these two agencies and their approval was necessary to further refine the number of alternatives for analysis and presentation at the next series of public meetings. There were 26 people who registered their attendance at the meeting, and the minutes for the meeting are contained in the **Appendix**. The following were issues expressed concerning the alternative corridors presented for further study.

- The information presented at the recent Agency Scoping Meeting on the Refined Alternative Corridors was summarized and provided to the attendees in a handout. That information on the Refined 1,000 Feet Wide Alternative Corridors is shown on Figure 2-2 and Table 2-3.
- The attendees were advised of the draft results of the completed Economic Study which considered three alternative corridors. Those corridors were a Western, Central, and Eastern alternatives. The Western and Eastern alternatives were entirely on new location while the Central Alternative followed US 61 as much as possible. The draft results of the Economic Study revealed the urban areas are critical to the location of I-69.

- The attendees were advised of the agreement reached at the Steering Committee Meeting held the previous day. For alternatives passing south of Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge, the agreement was to keep the alternatives south of Litton Road so as not to interfere with a possible southern expansion of the Refuge.
- Using Figure 2-2 and Table 2-3 for reference, the alternative corridors recommended for elimination from further study were reviewed. Comments were received and questions were addressed.
- The alternatives recommended for further study, **as shown on Figure \_\_\_\_\_**, were presented and a handout was provided. It was explained that the shaded portions on the map represented alternative segments that were recommended for elimination from further study, and that the alternatives were recommended for elimination based on the evaluation of known natural and human environmental information, field reviews, and public comments.
- The following recommendations were made on the alternative corridors.
  - ❖ The common portion of Alternatives A, D, H, and I would remain from Benoit to south of SR 322 crossing in Coahoma County where the alternatives would turn east to cross US 61 and join the Clarksdale Bypass. Input received from Coahoma County Officials and citizens strongly indicated they wanted the Clarksdale Bypass utilized for I-69 around Clarksdale. Except for some minor needs, the Clarksdale Bypass is being constructed to interstate standards. Traffic can only access the Bypass at interchange locations, and with some minor work, such as paving the shoulders, the Bypass could be upgraded to fully meet interstate standards. Traffic studies have determined the Bypass can accommodate the projected traffic for I-69.
  - ❖ Input received from Tunica County Officials and citizens strongly indicated they wanted alternatives between the City of Tunica and the casinos at Robinsonville studied that would pass east of the City of Tunica and east of the Tunica Airport. Such a routing of alternatives would avoid the casinos and development associated with the casinos located west of US 61, and avoid most of the residential build-up associated with the City of Tunica.
  - ❖ Alternative D follows the Mississippi River Levee corridor and passes through a very narrow space along SR 1 between the Levee and Moon Lake before crossing US 49. North of US 49 Alternative D passes through very unpopulated areas and pristine natural environmental areas to the west of the City of Tunica before turning east near the casinos and associated development near Robinsonville.
  - ❖ Alternative A passes to the west of the City of Tunica through a narrow environmental corridor.
  - ❖ Alternatives A, D, H, and I are recommended for elimination north of SR 322 for the following reasons: the alternatives do not satisfy the desires of the public for using Clarksdale Bypass and passing east of the City of Tunica; and, these alternatives join other alternatives that are recommended for further study between Clarksdale and the Coahoma/Tunica County Line.
  - ❖ All of Alternative F was recommended for elimination. The USF&WS and others want the alternative that connects Benoit to US 61 in the vicinity of Merigold to follow a route that takes the alternative south of the

Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge. From where Alternative F joins Alternative B near Merigold, these two alternatives are the same to the northern termini of the project. Therefore, the entire length of Alternative F was recommended for elimination.

- ❖ The entire portion of Alternative B is recommended for further study. This corridor passes south of Dahomey National Wildlife, crosses SR 8 west of Cleveland, joins US 61 near Merigold, uses as much of US 61 as possible before joining the Clarksdale Bypass. North of Clarksdale, Alternative B uses as much of US 61 as possible before proceeding northeast on new location in Tunica County near Dundee.
- ❖ Alternatives C, E, and G are concurrent from Benoit to north of the State Penal Farm where they separate. The concurrent portion of these alternatives passes south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge, crosses SR 8 east of Cleveland, proceeds north on new location between US 61 and the State Penal Farm. When Alternatives C, E, and G, separate, Alternatives C and E remain concurrent until connecting with the Clarksdale Bypass. A slight modification in this concurrent section was recommended for further study. The modification would result in a routing that would stay east of US 61 until connecting with the Clarksdale Bypass.
- ❖ Alternative G from the separation point with Alternatives C and E proceeds northeast on new location, crosses US 49 southeast of the Clarksdale Bypass, continues north to cross SR 6 using a narrow corridor and rejoins Alternative C south Jonestown. This portion of Alternative G does not use the Clarksdale Bypass, would open a new environmental corridor, and is recommended for elimination.
- ❖ Alternative C leaves the US 61 corridor at the north portion of the Clarksdale Bypass and proceeds northeast on new location to join Alternative G. The two alternatives remain concurrent on new location proceeding northeast to bypass the Town of Jonestown. They turn north to join Alternative H, and the three alternatives then join Alternative I on new location near the Coahoma/Tunica County Line. Alternative C from the separation point with US 61; the concurrent section of Alternatives C and G; and, the concurrent section of Alternatives C, G, and H are recommended for elimination from further study. These section of alternatives recommended for elimination are in a floodplain for most of their length, and the recommendation is based on the obvious negative impacts these alternative segments would have when compared to using a new location alternative to the east from the north end of the Clarksdale Bypass to the Swan Lake/Clarksdale Airport area and the US 61 corridor over the approximate 8.0 mile between the Swan Lake/Clarksdale Airport area and the Coahoma/Jonestown/Rich area.
- ❖ Implementing the previous recommendation would result in having only one alternative corridor which would use US 61 as much as possible between the north end of the Clarksdale Bypass and the Coahoma/Jonestown, Rich area. The one recommended alternative, which is Alternative B, would avoid the built-up area along US 61 between the north end of the Clarksdale Bypass and the Clarksdale Airport/Swan Lake area. The recommended alternative would avoid impacting the Clarksdale

Airport and Swan Lake, and it appears the one recommended alternative would have minimal environmental impacts along US 61 between Swan Lake to south of the US 49 intersection where two alternatives would be studied. One of the alternatives recommended for further study would continue to use US 61, which is Alternative Corridor B, and the other alternative would be a new segment proceeding northeast on new location before joining Alternative C near the Coahoma/Tunica County Line. If the study determined more than one alternative was needed in this area, the consultant team advised other alternatives, including those recommended for elimination in this area, will be considered and evaluated.

- ❖ Alternative C was recommended for further study from near the Coahoma/Tunica County Line to the northern termini of the project.
- ❖ Connecting segments were recommended in the south part of Tunica County to join Alternative B with Alternative C and Alternative C with Alternative B. A connecting segment was also recommended in the central portion of Tunica County to join Alternative B with Alternative C. The consultant team advised these connecting segments provided flexibility to develop and refine alternatives in this area which could result in study alternatives that were combinations of the two general corridors.
- One of the attendees at the meeting was Mr. Bob Black, who is an attorney for the FHWA in Washington D.C., and he has been assigned to the I-69 transcontinental corridor studies as the FHWA reviewer for legal sufficiency. Reviewing the development of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and reviewing the EIS for consideration of alternatives are included in Mr. Black's assignment for this project on SIU 11. His questions and the comments to those questions are contained in the meeting minutes in the Appendix. One of the questions Mr. Black was asked concerned only having one alternative that used as much of US 61 as possible between the Clarksdale Bypass and the US 49 intersection near the Coahoma/Tunica County Line. As part of his response to that question, Mr. Black advised as long as there are no critical habitats, or other critical issues, it would be permissible.
- The attendees were advised that anyone interested in commenting on the recommended alternatives should do so within the next few weeks so as not to affect the planning for the next series of public meetings.

**Noteworthy actions in Alternative Development between the MDOT/FHWA Alternative Corridor Review Meeting held in May and the Second Series of Public Meetings conducted approximately two months later on July 16-18, 2002**

- There were not any objections received from the MDOT or FHWA on the 1,000 feet wide alternative corridors recommended for elimination or those recommended for further study.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provided the project team updated information on the locations of the agricultural easements for Ducks Unlimited sites within the study area, and the alternatives were adjusted to lessen the impacts on the easements.
- Field trips to view the refined alternatives were made on May 21-23 and June 12-14, 2002. Any needed adjustments in the alternatives were made after these field trips.
- The Environmental Screening Analysis for the 1000 feet wide alternatives was updated.

## **Second Series of Public Meetings held on July 16-18, 2002**

Three identical public meetings were held on successive evenings in the Cleveland, Clarksdale, and Tunica areas respectively. One hundred and twenty (129) people registered their attendance at the Cleveland Meeting, 76 at the Clarksdale Meeting, and 83 at the Tunica Meeting. The **Appendix** contains the minutes for the Second Series of Public Meetings. The handout packet presented to the attendees at these meetings included the map of alternatives recommended for further study, shown on Figure \_\_\_\_\_, and a spreadsheet screening analysis of the alternatives recommended for further study, shown on Figure \_\_\_\_\_. The following things learned from discussions and comments received in response to the Second Series of Public Meetings aided the project team in making decisions on the alternatives corridors advanced for study.

- At this point in the project, the SIU 11 project team was using the same connecting points to SR 1 that were being used for the adjacent study to the west on SIU 12. The SR 1 connecting point north of Benoit created an out of direction alignment when proceeding east in a path that would take an alternative south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge and south of Litton Road. This out of direction alternative generated several negative public comments at the Cleveland meeting.
- The middle SR 1 connecting point on the SIU 12 study is located just south of Downtown Benoit. This point was eliminated from consideration for the SIU 11 study because the crossing of SR 1 could not be continued to the east without bisecting the Town of Benoit and creating a large number of displacements. The comments received in response to the public meetings did not offer any objections to eliminating this crossing point.
- The southern SR 1 connecting point was just south of Ray Brooks School. This crossing point was used for the SIU 11 study, but it received some negative comments from the public at the meeting in Cleveland because of it being located so close to the school.
- At each of the meetings changes to farmland access were comments of concern expressed by landowners or people who farm rented land. These people were concerned that they would not be adequately reimbursed for the improvements they had made to the land. They expressed concern about having a reduction in the amount of land farmed to a level that it would cause an economic hardship. They did not want to be forced to alter their farming operations, and they wanted to know how they would access farmland divided by alternative corridors.
- The Comprehensive Master Land Use and Transportation Plan for Tunica County and the Town of Tunica, performed by Allen & Hoshall independent of this I-69 study had recommended a location for I-69 in Tunica County similar to the West One alternative corridor presented at the Second Series of Public Meetings. The County's recommended alternative for I-69 and Comprehensive Master Land Use and Transportation Plan are shown on Figure \_\_\_\_\_. The primary differences in the County's recommended corridor and the West One alternative were the connection to US 61 in the south part of the County and the connection to the SR 304 spur at the northern termini of the study.

### **Special Meeting with MDOT Third District Representatives in Jackson at MDOT Environmental Division on August 6, 2002.**

The purpose of the meeting was to hear the Third District's concerns and suggestions about the Western Alternative Corridor between Benoit and the Clarksdale Bypass. The following things learned from discussions and comments received at this meeting aided the project team in making decisions on the alternatives corridors advanced for study.

- The southern portion of current western relocation alternative is located west of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and east of the Mississippi River. This location blocks the planned westward expansion of the Dahomey NWR to the Mississippi River. Everyone in attendance at the meeting agreed such a location would probably prevent the alternative from receiving serious consideration entirely through the environmental process. To make sure a west relocation alternative, a central alternative, and east relocation alternative receive serious consideration from Benoit to Clarksdale, it was agreed the consultant team would determine if a new west relocation alternative could be developed by combining the current central alternative with the current west alternative. From Benoit to SR 8 west of Cleveland, the new western alternative would use the current central alternative. The new western relocation alternative then would leave the central alternative and connect to the current western alternative south of the crossing of SR 444. Such an alignment for a new west relocation alternative would not impact any westward expansion of the Dahomey NWR to the Mississippi River.
- Subsequent to this meeting, the consultant team developed the new western relocation alternative, and the project team determined the new alternative merited further study. Steps were taken to bring the degree of the study on the new western relocation alternative to the same level as that which had been conducted on the other alternatives that remain under consideration.

### **Mayors-County Supervisors Coordination Meeting on September 4, 2002, and Optional Field Trip on September 5, 2002**

This meeting was held from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in Clarksdale at the Headquarters of the Delta Regional Authority. This meeting's purpose was to update the mayors and county supervisors on the status of the project and to obtain their input on the limited number of merited alternative corridors the project teams believed should be taken forward for detailed study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The handouts provided at the Second Series of Public Meetings were included in the packet provided to this meeting's attendees. The minutes for the meeting are contained in the **Appendix**, and the following things learned from discussions and comments received in response to the meeting and field trip aided the project team in making decisions on the alternatives corridors advanced for study.

- A Tunica County representative requested that an interchange be added where alternatives cross Dubbs Road in the south part of the county. The consultant team subsequently complied with this request.
- Dividing farmland and impacting access are problems of concern throughout the project. The attendees were advised the project team intends to address those problems in a fair and uniform manner.
- A representative from the City of Cleveland asked for and received an explanation of how the Central Alternative Corridor that uses US 61 could be converted into I-69.

- To insure a western alternative is studied, the attendees were advised an alternative segment avoiding the western expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge will be added. The alternative would use the Central Alternative between Benoit and Cleveland, but after crossing SR 8 west of Cleveland the alternative would proceed north on new location and join the current western alternative near the crossing of SR 444.
- During the afternoon portion of the field visit on September 5, the project team toured key economic development associated sites in Tunica County. The County Administrator believes an alternative that passes to the east of the airport and close to the casino gaming development area at Robinsonville is in the best interest of the County's long-range economic development plan.
- Several weeks after this meeting and field trip, a Coahoma County official telephoned the project team requesting an interchange be considered in the south part of Coahoma County for the east alternative at the county road east of the Bobo community. The requested interchange was subsequently added.

#### **Agency-Native American Scoping Meeting on September 4, 2002, and Optional Field Trip on September 5, 2002**

This meeting was held from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. in Clarksdale at the Headquarters of the Delta Regional Authority. This meeting's purpose was to update the cooperating agencies, other key governmental agencies, and the Native Americans on the status of the project and to obtain their input on the limited number of merited alternative corridors the project teams believed should be taken forward for detailed study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The handouts provided at the Second Series of Public Meetings were included in the packet provided to this meeting's attendees. There were not any Native American tribal representatives in attendance at the meeting. The minutes for the meeting are contained in the Appendix, and the following things learned from discussions and comments received in response to the meeting and field trip aided the project team in making decisions on the alternatives corridors advanced for study.

- A representative from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asked for and received an explanation of how the Alternative Corridor that uses US 61 could be converted into I-69.
- The attendees were advised that agricultural easements, such as Wetland Reserve Program sites and Ducks Unlimited sites, were avoided as much as possible when developing alternatives. However, due to the number of agricultural easements contained in the study area it was impossible to avoid all of them. When alternatives passed through agricultural easements, the attendees were advised efforts were made to locate the alternatives near the outer edges of the easements to minimize the impacts.
- To insure a western alternative is studied, the attendees were advised an alternative segment avoiding the western expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge will be added. The alternative would use the Central Alternative between Benoit and Cleveland, but after crossing SR 8 west of Cleveland the alternative would proceed north on new location and join the current western alternative near the crossing of SR 444.
- Questions from the agency representatives during the meeting and during the field trip the following day appeared to be answered to be satisfactorily answered, and the agency representatives did not make any objections to the alternatives presented for further study in the Draft EIS.

### **Special Meeting in Jackson at MDOT Roadway Design Division on September 11, 2002**

Neel-Schaffer asked for this meeting to discuss the alignment corridors in Tunica County and other roadway design project issues. The information received from this meeting was needed to assist the project team in preparing for a Tunica County meeting scheduled for the following week. One of the issues expected to be discussed at the upcoming meeting was the alternative alignment that Allen and Hoshall proposed for I-69 when they prepared the Comprehensive Master Land Use and Transportation Plan for Tunica County and the City of Tunica. The following things learned from discussions and comments received at this meeting aided the project team in making decisions on the alternatives corridors advanced for study.

- The initial discussions concerned the skew angle proposed by Allen and Hoshall for their I-69 interchange location at SR 304. The Roadway Design representatives advised the skew angle is too severe and unacceptable. They stated that, measured from a perpendicular, a zero to fifteen degree angle is recommended, with a maximum allowable angle of 30 degrees allowed in rare instances.
- The following SR 304 interchange concepts for the western and eastern alternatives were discussed.
  - ❖ For the western alternative, an interchange at or near Kirby Road with a short connection to SR 304 was suggested. Unless justified by traffic, an interchange at SR 3 was not suggested. The at-grade railroad crossing would remain for the western alternative.
  - ❖ For the eastern alternative, an interchange was suggested at existing SR 304 east of the railroad. Since SR 304 would become a major access to the casinos and Robinsonville area, it was agreed SR 304 would need improving west of I-69 at this interchange. The improvements should include relocating SR 304, providing a bridge over the railroad, providing a bridge over SR 3, and connecting the relocated SR 304 to existing SR 304 west of SR 3.
- The Roadway Design representatives were shown the new central to west relocation alternative in Bolivar County between SR 8 west of Cleveland and SR 444. The Roadway Design representatives did not have any problems with considering this new alternative in the study. This addressed the MDOT's Third District's concern of having a west relocation alternative taken through the study that would not impact the westward expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge to the Mississippi River.

### **Special Meeting in Jackson at Neel-Schaffer on September 16, 2002**

Bolivar County and the City of Cleveland officials requested this meeting to discuss any planning the city or county might need to initiate regarding the connecting routes for the alternatives recommended for detailed study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

After the local officials were briefed on the status of the study, they agreed it would be wise to delay the connecting road issue until after the Preferred Alternative is selected.



### **Special Meeting in Tunica on September 18, 2002**

This meeting was held at the request of Tunica County Administrator Ken Murphree in his office at Tunica. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the locations of the alternatives recommended for further study in the north part of Tunica County from Arkabutla Dam Road to the north end of the project.

Those in attendance at the meeting included: Mr. Ken Murphree, Tunica County Administrator; Mr. Charles Goforth, with Allen and Hoshall, Inc.; and Messrs. Robert Walker and Jimmy Shirley with Neel-Schaffer, Inc.

Mr. Murphree opened the meeting by asking the representatives from Neel-Schaffer to describe how the west alternative they had developed in the north part of the county compares with the corridor that Allen and Hoshall had developed for I-69 in the *Comprehensive Master Land Use and Transportation Plan for Tunica County and the Town of Tunica*. Mr. Jimmy Shirley addressed the request in the following manner.

- Displaying the alternatives that Neel-Schaffer recommends for further study and the alternative recommended for I-69 by Allen and Hoshall on mapping.
- Verifying, by using the mapping as a visual aid, that from Arkabutla Dam Road northeast to Kirby Road the West Alternative developed by Neel-Schaffer compares favorably with the alternative developed by Allen and Hoshall.
- Verifying, by using the mapping as a visual aid, that the major difference in the West Alternative developed by Neel-Schaffer and the alternative developed by Allen and Hoshall is from Kirby Road northeast across SR 304 to the connection to the SR 304 Spur that is presently under construction.
- Advising that – based on the meeting with the MDOT Roadway Design Division representatives on September 11, 2002 – the severe crossing angle of SR 304 used for the Allen and Hoshall alternative is unacceptable.
- Advising, and showing by using the mapping as a visual aid, that taking the necessary steps to obtain an acceptable SR 304 crossing angle for the Allen and Hoshall alternative is not recommended because it has far more negative impacts than the West Alternative of Neel-Schaffer's.

Based on the meeting with the MDOT Roadway Design Division on September 11, 2002, Mr. Shirley then advised the group of the recommended interchange locations – and connecting roads at those interchange locations – that Neel-Schaffer intended to use for studying the two recommended alternative corridors between Arkabutla Dam Road and the north end of the project. The section between Arkabutla Dam Road and SR 304 is an area of particular interest to Mr. Murphree and Mr. Goforth because SR 304 is a major access to the casinos at Robinsonville. Included in the items, Mr. Shirley discussed on this subject were the following comments.

- For the Western Alternative, an interchange is proposed between US 61 and SR 3 at Kirby Road. North of the interchange, Kirby Road would be realigned and reconstructed to SR 304 where a reconstructed signalized intersection would be provided. For this alternative, the Kirby Road Interchange would be the main interchange servicing the casinos at Robinsonville.

- For the Western Alternative, traffic volumes at SR 3 and the relatively short distance between adjacent interchanges at Kirby Road and SR 3 will probably not justify an interchange at SR 3.
- For the Western Alternative, an interchange is proposed east of the SR 3 to connect I-69 with the SR 304 Spur at existing SR 304. West of that interchange, it is proposed that SR 304 would be reconstructed to a minimum of a five-lane section and join the existing five-lane section on SR 304 at the SR 3 intersection. The at-grade railroad crossing east of the SR 3 intersection would remain.
- For the Eastern Alternative, an interchange is proposed east of SR 3 to connect I-69 with the SR 304 Spur at existing SR 304. West of that interchange, it is proposed that SR 304 would be reconstructed on new location north of existing SR 304. The relocated section would include a bridge over the railroad and SR 3. The relocated section of SR 304 would join the existing five-lane section of SR 304 west of SR 3. For this alternative, this would be the main interchange servicing the casinos at Robinsonville.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Murphree and Mr. Goforth appeared satisfied with the explanations provided by Neel-Schaffer for the differences between the West Alternative of Neel-Schaffer and the I-69 corridor suggested by Allen and Hoshall. These two men also appeared satisfied with the approach Neel-Schaffer is using in advancing the Tunica County alternatives for more detailed studies.

#### **HNTB Public Hearing on SIU 12 at Ray Brooks School on September 25, 2002**

The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) is coordinating this study that involves the State of Arkansas, the State of Mississippi, and the I-69 Mississippi River Crossing. Because of the concern about the message that will be delivered to the public about the eastern end of the SIU 12 project at SR 1, the AHTD requested that a representative from the SIU 11 study team attend the Public Hearing. The SIU 11 study representative that attended the Public Hearing was Mr. Jimmy Shirley.

HNTB mailed a project newsletter in September 2002, and that newsletter included an invitation to the Public Hearings in McGehee, AR on September 24, 2002, and Ray Brooks School near Benoit, MS on September 25, 2002. HNTB also mailed a newsletter in March 2002, and that newsletter included an invitation to the Public Meetings in McGehee on March 13, 2001, and Ray Brooks School on March 14, 2001. These two mail-outs provide noteworthy information on HNTB's three alternatives for connecting to SR 1 in the Benoit area.

HNTB presented the north connection to SR 1 as their Preferred Alternative in the Benoit area, and the newsletter invitation to the Public Hearing stated the following concerning that alternative.

- In Mississippi, three alternatives alignments to the east of the bridge were considered. Of the three, the "North" alternative has the fewest impacts to area structures and historic sites and has received significant local support. It also avoids the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge as I-69 is continued to the east. The final location of I-69 near Benoit will be coordinated with the section of I-69 to the east.

Mr. Jerry Mugg delivered the following noteworthy comments for HNTB during his short presentation.

- The three alternatives that HNTB considered for connecting to SR 1 share a common alignment from the Mississippi River Crossing to slightly west of Lake Bolivar.
- The North Alternative that HNTB selected as the Preferred Alternative appeared to provide the SIU 11 study team good flexibility in making a connection to the HNTB study with alternatives that could either proceed north between the Mississippi River Bridge and the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) or east in a manner that travels south of the Dahomey NWR.
- The final location of I-69 near Benoit will be coordinated with the SIU 11 section of I-69 to the east.
- Representatives of the HNTB Study Team for SIU 12, the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, and the SIU 11 Study Team were in attendance at the meeting to address questions, problems, and concerns from the public.
- The public was encouraged to complete the comment sheets and submit the comment sheets to the HNTB study team.

To assist him in addressing SIU 11 questions and comments, Mr. Shirley had mapping at his display area of the alternatives undergoing further study from SR 1 to the south end of the Clarksdale Bypass. The main questions and comments that Mr. Shirley received were about the following:

- Concern about disrupting farmland, dividing farmland, and access to the divided farmland.
- The need to consider an alternative that crossed SR 1 and Lake Bolivar farther south in the vicinity of an area known as Lake Vista. This was discussed with several people, and two of these people were Mr. Delbert Farmer and his son, Wayne. The Farmers submitted written comments, and the following written comments from them were typical of those Mr. Shirley received at the hearing.
  - ❖ It is the shortest route from the Mississippi River Bridge to SR 1.
  - ❖ It does not cut the farmland into small unprofitable units or destroy valuable drainage.
  - ❖ It moves away from the Mississippi River Levee system very quickly which removes many seepwater and echo problems.
  - ❖ It stays away from Ray Brooks School, the City of Benoit, the Benoit Outing Club, the Levee View Estate apartments, and the community of Bolivar – which solves some of their noise and accessibility concerns.
  - ❖ Contrary to HNTB's I-69 Mississippi River Crossing, September 25, 2002, Benoit Meeting Announcement, the North Alternative has very little local support. To connect to the North Alternative and take I-69 to the east would mean that Benoit would be located in sort of a horseshoe with I-69 in close proximity on three sides. This would destroy the Town of Benoit. The support this out of the way route has received is certainly not local.

### **Special Tunica County Meeting at Greater New Saint Paul Church on October 21, 2002**

This meeting concerned the Oak Grove M.B. Church, the Prichard Road area west of the church, the Verner Road area near the Verner Road Park, and the Bonds Road area east and north of the Verner Road Park. The meeting had three goals. Informing the people living in this area or attending Oak Grove M.B. Church that the location of the I-69 alternative corridor receiving the most favorable comments in this portion of Tunica County could impact their home or pass near this church was the first goal. The second goal was to address these people's questions, problems, and concerns. The final goal of the meeting was to provide these people an opportunity to furnish their written comments.

The arrangements for scheduling and conducting the meeting were coordinated by Mr. Ken Weeden under the project's Community Involvement and Environmental Justice outreach efforts. The meeting was well advertised by letters to key community contacts, flyers in nearby community gathering places, and by making an announcement at a worship service conducted in the Oak Grove M.B. Church. There were 74 people who registered their attendance at the meeting conducted east of Tunica in the Fellowship Hall of the Greater New Saint Paul Church.

A member of the project team provided a status report. The general session portion of the meeting then adjourned into approximately eight areas. Aerial photography mapping of the alternative corridors under consideration was provided at these eight areas for the public to view, ask questions and make comments. The alternative corridor that had received the most favorable comments crossed Prichard Road slightly west of the Oak Grove M.B. Church, extended north across Verner Road, turned northeast after crossing Arkabutla Dam Road, continued northeast paralleling SR 304 to the south, and turned north after crossing SR 3 to connect with the SR 304 Spur presently under construction. This alternative had received the most favorable comments because it was closer to the Town of Tunica, the Tunica Airport, planned industrial expansion associated with the airport, US 61, Robinsonville and its casinos. For the alternative that had received the most favorable public comments, the people interested in the Oak Grove M.B. Church were advised an interchange could be provided at Prichard Road without directly impacting the church or the adjacent cemetery. Upon learning this, the people with concerns about the church property appeared satisfied. For the alternative that had received the most favorable comments, most of the comments concerned the residences that would be relocated by the crossing of Verner Road and the noise impacts to those residences that would remain along Verner and Bonds Road. The land at Verner Road is low and frequently floods. Many Verner Road residents stated they would like the crossing of Verner Road to require their relocation so they could leave this low area.

After the break-out sessions, the meeting closed with a general session. Some of the items discussed in the break-out sessions were discussed again either in the form of questions with answers from the project team or in the form of comments from the local citizenry. The project team advised the attendees that a follow-up meeting would be conducted after the study alternatives were further refined and the residential relocations were identified at the crossing of Verner Road. The meeting concluded with the project team encouraging the people attending the meeting to submit their written comments. Six written comments were received in response to this meeting. The comments were all from people who wanted to be relocated from this area prone to flooding, and a couple of the comments were from people who asked relocation assistance questions.

**Property Ownership Search Completed and Placed on Alternative Corridor Mapping prior to Steering Committee Meeting on December 9, 2002.**

This information was available electronically from Tunica County, but the records had to be searched by hand for the remaining counties of Bolivar, Sunflower, and Coahoma. The information was needed to determine the locations of alternatives relative to property lines. Obtaining the property ownership for farmland was very important to determine where farmland was being divided and if the alternatives could be adjusted to lessen or avoid the impact of dividing the farmland.

Within the opportunities and constraints allowed by the natural and human environments, the following approach was used in refining the alternatives to minimize the impact on neighborhoods, community cohesions, and disruption of farming operations.

- Alternative corridors were generally placed at the fringe areas of municipalities and communities, and a grade separation or interchange was placed at a nearby US highway, state highway, or county road to provide access for local traffic to cross the interstate.
- The alternative corridors were placed adjacent to or nearby the existing road network. This approach maintained existing traffic patterns, lessened the need for providing frontage roads, and was an effort to lessen the impact to farming operations divided by the interstate.
- The typical spacing between interchanges or grade separations was kept to no more than two miles when a property owner's access to the other side of the interstate was divided.
- The locations of changes in property ownership and primary drainage ditches were important factors used in developing the alternatives for further study. Primary drainage ditches are important to consider because they tend to naturally divide farming operations.

Tunica County alternative were refined using the property ownership information from the initial development of the one-mile wide alternatives, to the narrowing of the alternative corridors widths to 1000 feet, and then to the narrowing of the alternative corridors to a width of 450 feet. The alternatives in the remaining counties of Bolivar, Sunflower, and Coahoma were refined continuously as the property ownership records became available. All of the property ownership records needed for all four counties was acquired by December of 2002.

**Interchanges and Connecting Road Needs, Preparation Work for Steering Committee Meeting on December 9, 2002.**

The Interchange and Connecting Road Plan for the various alternatives was completed in the time frame between the HNTB SIU 12 Public Hearing in September and the Steering Committee Meeting on December 9, 2002.

To compare the alternatives in each section, the locations of interchanges were selected. Interchanges are mandatory at some locations, and interchanges were placed at other locations for stimulating economic development and for construction phasing. The condition on the crossroad at each interchange location was reviewed to determine the improvements that were needed on the crossroad to accommodate truck traffic generated by the interchanges.

It is important to consider the improvements needed on the crossroad at interchange locations for several reasons. One reason is to satisfy the expectations of the drivers for the various types of vehicles, including legally loaded trucks, which will exit and enter the interstate by using the crossroad within and outside the limits of the interchange. Another important reason is associated with maintenance of traffic during and after the construction of SIU 11.

Because the cost for building the entire section of SIU 11 is so large, the construction will almost certainly have to be accomplished in a number of segments. The segmental construction will require SIU 11 traffic to use the interchange locations and the connecting network of county roads and state and Federal highways to enter and exit the interstate segments that are opened to traffic. Therefore, it is important for truck traffic to have at least one connecting approach to each interchange location capable of accommodating truck traffic and a posting of the maximum allowable weight limit in Mississippi of 80,000 pounds.

At some interchange locations, a crossroad is recommended on new location from the interchange to a nearby state or Federal highway that has an 80,000 pound weight limit posted for truck traffic. In addition to addressing the need of accommodating truck traffic, the new crossroad approach might be needed to address transportation network connectivity or Design Year 2030 traffic. In these instances the new crossroad approach is called a "Spur".

Several of the proposed interchanges are with state or Federal highways that currently have an 80,000 pound weight limit. Improvements are either planned or not needed outside the limits of many of these interchanges for the crossing highway to accommodate the Design Year 2030 projected traffic. At the remaining crossroads some improvements will be needed, and those improvements are called an "Upgrade".

The following will elaborate on the "Upgrade". The existing crossroad at a proposed interchange location may have a legal weight limit of less than 80,000 pounds posted from the interchange to a nearby state or Federal highway with the maximum allowable weight limit. However, if the crossroad was improved along its existing alignment, it could accommodate 80,000 pound truck traffic and the Design Year 2030 projected traffic. In such instances the needed crossroad approach improvement is called an "Upgrade".

#### **Steering Committee Meeting at MDOT Environmental Division the morning of December 9, 2002**

The 13<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee Meeting was conducted on December 9, 2002. The goals for the meeting were updating the MDOT Second and Third Districts on the project status, discussing and resolving some work plan concerns about the archaeological studies, and discussing Mr. Walter Lyon's e-mail of November 12, 2002. Mr. Lyons is the Third District Engineer for the MDOT. The minutes for this meeting are contained in the **Appendix**.

MDOT Environmental Engineer Claiborne Barnwell opened the meeting by providing a brief project status update with particular attention given to the archeological work status.

MDOT Third District Engineer Walter Lyons advised the group there were several questions he had about having an alternative that uses US 61 for I-69. Mr. Lyons stated those questions and the questions were then addressed by Mr. Barnwell and Messrs. Robert Walker and Jimmy Shirley of the consultant team.

- Has MDOT ever converted a four-lane facility with Type II-B and at-grade intersections into an interstate?
  - ❖ Mr. Barnwell advised he was not aware of anywhere in Mississippi where this has been done. However, he stated the idea was seriously considered for a future section of US 49 between Florence and the Gulf Coast. The right of way costs associated with relocations along that corridor was the reason the idea was dropped.
  - ❖ Mr. Shirley added the concept of utilizing US 61 for I-69 in Mississippi is documented in previous I-69 studies.
- How do you make this transition while having to maintain traffic? What is the sequence of operations?
  - ❖ Using mapping sheets and a typical section as displays, Mr. Shirley responded to Mr. Lyons' questions. The mapping sheets depicted the Central Alternative in Bolivar County from the SR 8 interchange west of Cleveland to the Coahoma County Line. The typical section for the Central Alternative was developed based on recommendations from the MDOT Roadway Design Division.
  - ❖ Mr. Shirley advised that, except for a short segment on relocation between Shelby and Hushpuckena, a concept of widening US 61 to the east would be used to construct the Central Alternative north of Merigold in Bolivar County. The widening concept calls for all the widening to be accomplished to one side of US 61 between logical termini. Such a widening concept could allow four-lane traffic to be maintained for the most part on US 61 throughout the construction. For the widening section in Bolivar County, the east side of US 61 was chosen to be widened because that side has fewer currently known negative impacts, such as potential relocations, throughout the county than the west.
  - ❖ Mr. Shirley discussed a construction sequencing for accomplishing the widening to the east when using US 61 for I-69. Refer to the minutes contained in the **Appendix** for a plan to accomplish the construction sequencing.
  - ❖ As Mr. Shirley discussed the widening construction sequencing for using US 61, he reviewed the Bolivar County mapping depicting the relocation and widening sections for the Central Alternative in the following south to north format.
    - From SR 8 west of Cleveland to southwest of Merigold, the Central Alternative is on relocation.
    - Southwest of Merigold, the Central Alternative has an interchange to service Merigold and North Cleveland, and to provide a connector to separate the concurrent routes of I-69 and US 61 north of the interchange.
    - From the interchange southwest of Merigold to west of Merigold, the Central Alternative continues on relocation before crossing US 61 and becoming concurrent with US 61.
    - From west of Merigold to the north part of Shelby, the Central Alternative is concurrent with US 61. Widening would be added to the east of US 61 to provide the I-69 northbound lane and any needed East Frontage Road. An interchange is proposed for Mound Bayou.

- From the north part of Shelby to the south part of Hushpuckena, the Central Alternative is on relocation to the east of US 61. Relocation to the east, instead of widening to the east, is recommended to avoid directly impacting an electric substation north of Shelby and adjacent to the northbound lanes. The east relocation provides a means of avoiding the loading areas for two abandoned crop duster landing strips, and the east relocation also provides a good location for a Shelby interchange. For I-69 northbound traffic, the proposed Shelby interchange would also service Hushpuckena and Duncan.
  - From the south part of Hushpuckena to the Coahoma County Line, the Central Alternative is concurrent with US 61. Widening would be added to the east of US 61 to provide the I-69 northbound lanes and any needed East Frontage Road. An interchange is proposed just south of Alligator. The Alligator interchange would also service Duncan for southbound I-69 traffic.
- ❖ No one present objected to the proposed Central Alternative in Bolivar County being an acceptable alternative for detailed study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- ❖ Without mapping displays and using the following south to north format, Mr. Shirley continued the discussion of the proposed Central Alternative.
  - From the Bolivar – Coahoma County Line to just south of the Bobo, the Central Alternative is concurrent with US 61. Widening would be added to the east of US 61 to provide the I-69 northbound lanes and any needed East Frontage Road. This is a short segment of less than one mile.
  - From just south of Bobo to south of Clarksdale, the Central Alternative proceeds on relocation to the west of US 61 before turning east and crossing US 61 to become concurrent with the US 61 Bypass. This avoids the build-up along US 61 between Bobo and the Bypass. An interchange is proposed at Bobo to provide a connector that would separate the concurrent routes of I-69 and US 61 south of the interchange. Another interchange would be provided at the south part of Clarksdale where the Central Alternative crosses US 61 to join the Clarksdale Bypass.
- ❖ From south of Clarksdale to just south of US 49 near the Coahoma – Tunica County Line, Mr. Shirley advised there is only one proposed alternative in Coahoma County. Without using mapping displays, Jimmy discussed the alternative's use of US 61 in the following south to north format.
  - From south of Clarksdale to north of the SR 6 Interchange, the alternative uses the Bypass.
  - From north of the SR 6 Interchange to south of Swan Lake, the alternative is on relocation to the east of US 61 before becoming concurrent with US 61 north of the Clarksdale Airport. An interchange is proposed near the airport at Eagles



- Nest Road to provide a connector to service the airport, the north part of Lyon, and the south part of Jonestown.
  - From south of Swan Lake to south of US 49 near the Coahoma – Tunica County Line, the alternative uses US 61. Widening would be added to the west of US 61 to provide the southbound lanes of I-69 and any needed West Frontage Road. An interchange is proposed at Coahoma. The interchange would also service Friars Point and the north part of Jonestown.
- ❖ From south of US 49 near the Coahoma – Tunica County Line to south of Dundee in Tunica County, Mr. Shirley advised there are two proposed alternatives. One alternative leaves US 61 and proceeds to the east on relocation and the other continues to use US 61 before proceeding east of relocation. In the following south to north format, Mr. Shirley continued his discussion of the West Alternative that continues to use US 61.
  - The West Alternative has a proposed interchange slightly north of the current intersection of US 49 and US 61. The proposed interchange would also service US 49, Rich, Lula, and the proposed Welcome Center. Widening for the West Alternative would continue to be added to the west of US 61 to provide the southbound lanes of I-69 and any needed West Frontage Road.
  - South of Dundee near Crenshaw Road, Mr. Shirley noted the West Alternative leaves the US 61 corridor and proceeds northeast on relocation. He advised an interchange is proposed at a relocation of Crenshaw Road to provide a connector to separate the concurrent routes of I-69 and US 61 south of the interchange.
- ❖ The group agreed the plan presented for an alternative using US 61 in Bolivar, Coahoma, and Tunica counties was acceptable for study in the DEIS.

Mr. Shirley distributed a one page mapping handout of the proposed alternatives that are being refined for further study in the DEIS. After asking everyone present to review the handout and provide their comments, he then made the following comments concerning connectivity and constructability.

- Recognizing that this project would almost certainly be constructed in segments of approximately ten miles or less and that there would be pressure to open completed sections of I-69 to traffic as soon as possible, the handout addresses connectivity requirements for maintaining traffic as the small segments of this 100 plus mile Section of Independent Utility are constructed and opened to traffic.
- The handout addresses a minimum number of estimated high quality connectors that would be required for each alternative based upon possible interchange locations and the economic development goal for the project.
- To accurately compare the alternatives, the estimated connectivity costs for each alternative should be contained in the DEIS.

The discussions then moved to the work plan for the archaeological work. Refer to the meeting minutes contained in the **Appendix** for the discussions concerning that work plan.

**Steering Committee Meeting at MDOT Environmental Division the afternoon of December 9, 2002**

The goals for the meeting were to discuss the work plan for preparing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and any changes in the work plan that were needed as a result of the Steering Committee Meeting conducted that morning with representatives of the MDOT Second and Third Districts. The minutes for this meeting are contained in the **Appendix**.

Mr. David Kelley of Coastal Environments advised approximately 75% of the high probability area survey work is complete in Tunica County, and that wet soil conditions in the county are delaying the work on most of the remaining 25%. The study of the preliminary Preferred Alternative has discovered two historical sites and two cemeteries south of Dubbs Road. One of the historical sites encompasses the entire estimated right of way width while the other is located partially within the estimated right of way. Coastal furnished Neel-Schaffer the necessary electronic information to locate the historical sites and cemeteries discovered on the preliminary Preferred Alternative in Tunica County. Neel-Schaffer modified the alternative to avoid or lessen the impact on the findings and then furnished Coastal the modified alignment for review. Based on Coastal's review, the modified alignment will either become the new alignment or adjusted until the best alignment with the least impacts is located. This is the procedure that will be followed whenever Coastal's survey work discovers areas that need to be avoided.

MDOT Environmental Engineer Claiborne Barnwell advised he wanted Mr. Ken Weeden of the consultant team to meet with any contacts he has that can represent the municipalities or communities along US 61 from Merigold to Bobo. The purpose of contacting these individuals is to obtain their input on the western relocation alternative relative to the central alternative between Merigold and Bobo.

To enable Coastal Environments to conduct the archaeological studies in Tunica County, Neel-Schaffer furnished Coastal mapping for the refined alternative alignments and initial conceptual design at the recommended interchange locations. The project team contacts were also provided a copy of the Tunica County mapping information. Mr. Jimmy Shirley of Neel-Schaffer then gave the following status report on providing similar information for the remaining counties of Coahoma, Sunflower and Bolivar.

- The information for Coahoma and Sunflower counties would be provided to the project team contacts within the next two to three weeks.
- Although the shape files for the property parcels impacted by the alternatives in Bolivar County were available electronically, there was a delay in obtaining the names of the property owners and the acreage they owned. The information needed is now available and no longer delaying the refinement of alternatives and conceptual interchange design for this county.
- West of SR 1 near Benoit in Bolivar County, there are some alignment connection issues to the adjacent study on SIU 12 that need addressing. Resolving those issues will not impact the alternatives undergoing detail study in the DEIS that are located north of Litton Road and east of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge.

Mr. Larry Meisner advised that Kimley-Horn also needed the Bolivar County refined alignments and conceptual interchange designs as soon as possible. Mr. Shirley later determined the Bolivar County information will be furnished to the project team contacts in the following two submittals.

- An initial submittal for the central and north portions of the county from approximately halfway between Litton Road and SR 446 extending north to the Bolivar – Coahoma County Line. The estimated date for that submittal is January 15, 2003.
- A second submittal for the south portion of the county from west of SR 1 near Benoit extending east and then north to approximately halfway between Litton Road and SR 446. That submittal would be made after resolving the connection issues to the adjacent study on SIU 12.

To address the connection of alternatives to SIU 12 west of SR 1 near Benoit, it was decided that one or more separate meetings may be needed to finalize the alternatives for detail study in the DEIS from Benoit proceeding east to the crossings of Litton Road.

At the Steering Committee held earlier in the day with the MDOT Second and Third Districts, Mr. Shirley presented a map of each alternative identifying recommended interchange locations and connectivity issues. The districts were asked to review the maps and provide their comments.

The mapping of the alternatives identifying recommended interchange locations and connectivity issues is a tool the consultant team can use to assist the team in estimating cumulative and secondary development. Mr. Meisner was furnished a copy of the concepts. Using the mapping and other available information, Mr. Barnwell advised Neel-Schaffer and Kimley-Horn to coordinate their efforts to estimate the cumulative and secondary development impacts for each alternative taken forward for study in the DEIS. Mr. Barnwell also wants the consultant team to consider connectivity costs when comparing the alternatives in the DEIS.

The need to conduct another public meeting, or another series of public meetings, in the spring of 2003 was discussed for the following reasons.

- The last series of public meetings were conducted on July 16-18, 2002. The estimated time frame for having the DEIS prepared and approved for presentation at a Public Hearing is late summer or early fall of 2003 at the earliest.
- Over a year will pass between the last series of public meetings and the public hearing. This is too long to not provide the public an opportunity to receive an update.
- By March of 2003 the project team will be able to provide the public more detailed information on the alternatives taken forward for study in the DEIS.

### **Special Benoit Meeting at Ray Brooks School during the morning of January 29, 2003**

The meeting's purpose was to update the Ray Brooks School, community, and farming contacts in the Benoit area on the status of the project and to obtain their input on the alternatives presented for detailed study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Invitation letters were mailed approximately two weeks prior to the meeting by Mr. Ken Weeden, the Environmental Justice Coordinator for the project. There were 17 people who registered their attendance on the sign-in sheets. Of these 17 people, six represented the MDOT, one represented the FHWA, four represented the consultant team, four represented farm interests, one represented the school, and one represented the Benoit I-69 Committee. The minutes for this meeting are contained in the **Appendix**.

The invitees were able to view maps of the alternatives in the Benoit area and discuss the alternatives with representatives of the MDOT, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and

consultant team. Most of the discussions concerned the alignments from SR 1 west to the connecting point on the adjacent study that HNTB Corporation is conducting for Section of Independent Utility (SIU) 12. The following concerns from SR 1 west to the connecting point for the SIU 12 study were expressed:

- separation of farmland and potential farmland access issues;
- seep water problems;
- drainage problems;
- proximity of alignments to the school (potential safety and noise issues)

After the project update was provided by Mr. Claiborne Barnwell of the MDOT and Mr. Robert Walker of the consultant team, the following are some of the questions asked, responses given, and comments made.

QUESTION: Mr. Wayne Farmer asked why the HNTB Study didn't consider a south of Benoit interchange crossing of SR 1 in the Lake Vista area.

RESPONSE: Mr. Barnwell responded that the HNTB study for SIU 12 considered three possible interchange locations in its study independent of the SIU 11 Study. These interchange locations included one interchange close to town, one interchange north of town, and one interchange south of town.

COMMENT: Mr. Wayne Farmer remarked that the West Alternate does not appear feasible because it blocks the proposed westward expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge. He continued by stating the interchange location north of town does not appear feasible because it is out of direction for an alternative proceeding east to the south of Litton Road. Since these two alternatives north of Benoit do not appear feasible, he asked consideration be given to adding a southern alternative that would cross SR 1 between the Ray Brooks School and Scott in the vicinity of the Lake Vista area.

RESPONSE: Mr. Barnwell responded that he would request the SIU 11 consultant team to conduct a study sufficient enough to determine if this request merits further study as an additional alternative in the DEIS.

QUESTION: Mr. Early Ewing, Chairman of the Benoit I-69 Committee, asked about providing an interchange between the I-69 Great River Bridge that could serve as a connector to SR 1 and Greenville.

RESPONSE: Mr. Jimmy Shirley, with the consultant team, advised Mr. Ewing this was beyond the Scope of Work for the SIU 11 study from Benoit to Robinsonville.

QUESTION: Mr. Early Ewing expressed his concern that a SR 1 Bypass of Benoit would be needed if the alternative crossing north of Benoit is not selected as the Preferred Alternative.

RESPONSE: Mr. Jimmy Shirley advised projected traffic for the 2030 Design Year would be developed for I-69 interchange alternatives at Benoit in the DEIS. He advised Mr. Ewing it was doubtful the projected traffic for SR 1 would warrant a SR 1 bypass of Benoit for any of the alternatives.

COMMENT: Mr. Early Ewing commented that he thought the view of Lake Bolivar along SR 1 at Lake Vista was one of the most scenic sites in the State of Mississippi.

RESPONSE: None

Mr. Barnwell advised the attendees to use the comment sheet they received at the meeting as the means to record any comments they want documented about this meeting. He advised they could either turn in their comment sheet to a member of the project team at the conclusion of the meeting or they could return it by mail to the project team.

### **Hwy 61 North Bolivar County Mayors Luncheon Meeting in Merigold on January 29, 2003**

The purpose at this meeting held at Crawdads Restaurant was to update the mayors along US 61 between Merigold and Alligator on the status of the project and to obtain their input on the alternatives presented for detailed study in the DEIS. Invitation letters to the mayors of Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville, Shelby, Duncan, and Alligator were mailed approximately two weeks prior to the meeting by Mr. Ken Weeden, the Environmental Justice Coordinator for the project. There were 19 people who registered their attendance on the sign-in sheets. Of these 19 people, four represented the MDOT, one represented the FHWA, five represented the consultant team, five were mayors, one is a town clerk, one is a Bolivar County Supervisor, and two were concerned citizens. Of the municipalities of Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville, Shelby, Duncan, and Alligator, the only mayor not in attendance at the meeting was the Mayor of Duncan. The meeting minutes are contained in the **Appendix**.

After introductions, Mr. Barnwell stated the need for written comments to the project. Mr. Barnwell stated that verbal comments would not become a permanent part of the record unless written and submitted to the project team. He made the attendees aware of the comment sheet they could use to furnish their written comments. Mr. Barnwell stated that the intent of the project is to choose the best alternative through consensus and that a major role of this project is to provide economic opportunities to the Delta.

During the introductions, the mayors, county supervisor, local official, and concerned citizens made statements concerning their desires for the outcome of this project. All the mayors and local officials wanted an alignment closest to their municipality because they believed such an alignment would provide the greatest economic impact. All agreed that the best alternative would be the alignment that converts existing US 61 to I-69. They also requested good access to the interstate from their municipality and some, including the Mayor of Alligator, requested an interchange next to their community. Mr. Jimmy Stokes, a citizen from Mound Bayou, emphasized that Bolivar County is a poor rural area which greatly needs economic stimulus. Mr. Stokes reminded the group of the creation of the Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone and the need to provide an economic boost to the communities in Bolivar County through the I-69 project.

Mr. Barnwell replied that one of the primary objectives in addition to providing for the movement of freight from Canada to Mexico for this project is economic stimulus. Mr. Cecil Vick, FHWA Environmental Coordinator for the Jackson Division Office, added that one of Congress' specific purposes for the I-69 project was addressing poverty in the Mississippi Delta and the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the State of Texas.

- Next, the attendees reviewed the maps depicting the alternative alignments recommended for detailed study in the DEIS between Cleveland and the Bolivar/Coahoma County Line. Most of the discussion concerned the central alternative that would convert as much of existing US 61 as possible to I-69. Mr. Jimmy Shirley, with the consultant team, explained the concept of how the conversion for that alternative could be accomplished.

During Mr. Shirley's discussion of the construction concept for converting US 61 to I-69 between Merigold and the county line, questions were addressed concerning interchange locations and how these six municipalities would be accessed from the four proposed interchanges located southwest of Merigold, near Mound Bayou, in north Shelby, and just south of Alligator.

Mayor Westerfield of Merigold asked the project team to review the concept for the interchange southwest of Merigold and determine if any improvements could be made in the concept to provide better access for Merigold. Mr. Shirley advised Mayor Westerfield that his request would be investigated and any needed adjustments in the concept for the DEIS would be implemented.

Mr. Barnwell closed the meeting by reminding the attendees to record any comments they want documented about the meeting on the comment sheet and to return the sheet to the project team as soon as possible.

**Bolivar/Sunflower Counties Community Issues Committee Dinner Meeting in at Crawdads Restaurant in Merigold on January 29, 2003.**

The MDOT conducted this dinner meeting at Crawdad's Restaurant in Merigold at 6:00 PM on January 29, 2003. The meeting's purpose was to update the county task force on the status of the project and to obtain their input on the alternatives presented for detailed study in the DEIS. Invitation letters were mailed approximately two weeks prior to the meeting by Mr. Ken Weeden of the consultant team. A sign-in sheet was circulated to register the attendance at the meeting. The minutes for the meeting are contained in the **Appendix**.

After Mr. Weeden provided welcoming comments and status report on the Three Community Issues Committees, he introduced Mr. Claiborne Barnwell of the MDOT. After making a welcoming statement and commenting on the status of the project, Mr. Barnwell asked everyone attending the meeting to state their name and association with the project. Of the 26 people attending the meeting, four represented the MDOT, one represented the FHWA, five represented the consultant team, and the remaining 16 were Bolivar and Sunflower County officials and/or residents. After introductions, Mr. Barnwell stated the need for written comments to the project. Mr. Barnwell stated that verbal comments would not become a permanent part of the record unless written and submitted to the project team. Mr. Barnwell stated that the intent of the project is to choose the best alternative through consensus and that a major role of this project is to provide economic opportunities to the Delta. Mr. Barnwell advised an informal format would be used for the dinner meeting. He suggested that everyone place their order from the menu, and then view the alternative mapping for Bolivar and Sunflower counties with the project team while the meals were being prepared.

The overwhelming comments from the attendees were the need to build the new interstate as soon as possible and to provide for the greatest economic stimulus to the area. Most of the people with Bolivar County interests stated their support for an alternative south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge that crosses SR 8 as far west of Cleveland as possible. By contrast, most of the people with Sunflower County interests continue to support an alternative that passes south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge, crosses US 61 north of Shaw, SR 8 east of Cleveland, and continues to the east on relocation until connecting to the south end of the

Clarksdale Bypass in Coahoma County. There was not much discussion concerning the central alternative north of Merigold. This was probably due to the central alternative being discussed in such detail earlier in the day at the North Bolivar County Meeting. There was also not much discussion concerning the west alternative between Benoit and Rosedale that passes between the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge and the Mississippi River. Those in attendance apparently accept that western alternative is not viable because it blocks the proposed westward expansion of the Refuge. There were no major expressions of interest for or against the modified western alignment that crosses SR 8 west of Cleveland at the same location as the central alternative and then proceeds northwest on relocation to connect to the western alternative near SR 444.

The questions, requests, responses, and comments that occurred while viewing the mapping displays included the following:

REQUEST: Reverend J.Y. Trice asked Mr. Robert Walker to determine if the central alternative crossing of SR 8 could be moved any further west.

RESPONSE: After the meeting, Mr. Walker discussed the request with Mr. Jimmy Shirley of the consultant team. Mr. Shirley advised moving the crossing any further west would be out of direction and add mileage to the central alternative. Although it might not add mileage to the modified west alternative, a westward relocation would move the modified west alternative farther away from the established municipalities of Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville, and Shelby. More bridges and unnecessary pipeline crossings would also be required if the crossing of SR 8 is moved farther west.

QUESTION: During small group discussions while viewing the alternative mapping, Mr. Shirley was asked several times which alternative he thought would eventually become the Preferred Alternative recommendation.

RESPONSE: Mr. Shirley's response was always that he did not know. He advised the people asking this question that the study of relocation alternatives in the environmental document must take into account the impact of providing adequate connecting roads at interchange locations. Mr. Shirley told these people that considering those impacts will be substantial for new location alternatives in areas where US 61 could be used for I-69. However, Mr. Shirley also advised these same people that converting US 61 when possible to I-69 would have high maintenance of traffic cost during the construction. He advised these people it is unknown at this time whether using US 61 as much as possible or being on relocation as much as possible would have the least negative impacts on the human and natural environments.

Mr. Barnwell closed the meeting by reminding the attendees to record any comments they want documented about the meeting on the comment sheet and to return the sheet to the project team as soon as possible.

**Coahoma County Community Issues Committee Meeting held at the Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce during the morning of January 30, 2003.**

The MDOT conducted this meeting at the Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce in Clarksdale at 10:00 AM on January 30, 2003. Like the meeting the previous evening, this meeting's purpose was to update the Committee on the status of the project and to obtain their input on the alternative corridors presented for detailed study in the DEIS. Invitation letters were mailed approximately two weeks prior to the meeting by Mr. Ken Weeden of the consultant

team. A sign-in sheet was circulated to register the attendance at the meeting. The minutes for the meeting are contained in the Appendix.

After making a welcoming statement and commenting on the status of the project, Mr. Barnwell asked everyone attending the meeting to state their name and association with the project. Of the 19 people attending the meeting, three represented the MDOT, one represented the FHWA, five represented the consultant team, and the remaining 10 were Coahoma County officials and/or residents.

The format used for this meeting was similar to the one used for the meeting held the previous evening in Merigold. During his comments, Mr. Walker presented the following sequence of alternatives in a south to north format for Coahoma County.

- Three alternatives from the Bolivar-Coahoma County Line to the south part of the Clarksdale Bypass.
- One alternative from the south part of the Clarksdale Bypass through central Coahoma County to near the US 49 intersection at the future welcome center site.
- Two alternatives from near the US 49 intersection at the future welcome center site to the Tunica County Line.

Mr. Claiborne Barnwell commented that the team is already looking at connectors and interchanges to provide a transportation network for the whole Mississippi Delta, and he stated that the MDOT will provide commitments and consideration in the final environmental document as part of the decision-making process that will be carried forward for future implementation of the right of way and construction contracts.

The attendees reviewed the alignments in Coahoma County. Some of the issues discussed included how the interstate would be accessed from the existing road network and a concern about coordination of the location of I-69 with the planned City of Clarksdale Airport Expansion. Neel-Schaffer is responsible for performing the engineering services for the planned airport expansion. Therefore, the Neel-Schaffer members of the project team for the I-69 project addressed this concern by stating the work on these two projects was being coordinated through their Jackson Office.

#### **Verner Road Area Tunica County Citizens Meeting held at the Tunica County Economic Development Building during the evening of January 30, 2003**

This meeting's purpose was to update the Oak Grove Church members and residents of the Bonds/Verner/Prichard Road areas on the status of the project and to obtain their input on the alternative corridors presented for detailed study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Invitation letters were mailed approximately two weeks prior to the meeting by Mr. Ken Weeden to the attendees of the previous meeting conducted in October of 2002. The meeting minutes are contained in the **Appendix**.

Upon entering the meeting location, a sign-in sheet was provided to register the 52 people who attended. Of these 52 people in attendance, six represented the MDOT, one represented the FHWA, five represented the consultant team, and the remaining 40 people were interested citizens or officials of the Tunica County area. This meeting was scheduled in response to a request by residents of the Bonds/Verner/Prichard Road areas. The residents had also requested an MDOT specialist in right of way issues to be present at the meeting. In response to that



request, there were two specialists in attendance from the Jackson Office of the MDOT and one from the MDOT Second District Office located at Batesville.

Mr. Ken Weeden provided welcoming and opening comments. He explained that the alternates had been revised and that this meeting was being held to give the citizens a change to ask question concerning the new alignments and to address any possible relocation or acquisition questions. He advised there were MDOT relocation specialists attending the meeting that could respond to specific questions or concerns of the project.

Mr. Barnwell discussed the history of the I-69 project and that one of the major goals of the project was providing economic development opportunities for the Lower Mississippi Delta, which includes Tunica County. Mr. Barnwell stated that verbal comments would not become a permanent part of this meeting's record. He advised the attendees they need to furnish their written comments for the record using the form they received when registering their attendance. Mr. Barnwell stated that the MDOT will provide commitments and consideration in the final environmental document as part of the decision-making process to minimize certain impacts to the local communities affected by the construction of the project.

Mr. Robert Walker of Neel-Schaffer provided a status report on the project, and he advised that Mr. Jimmy Shirley of the project team would provide an update on the two alternatives for crossing Prichard Road. As part of that update, Mr. Walker stated an estimate would be provided for the number of residents that would be relocated at the Verner Road crossing for the alternative closest to Tunica. He advised that after the update is given an opportunity will be provided to ask questions prior to viewing the mapping displays for the alternatives.

Mr. Cecil Vick with the FHWA made some comments on the national, regional, and local significance of the study. He also commented on the status of this study relative to other studies on the I-69 Corridor.

Mr. Shirley commented there were two alternatives for crossing Prichard Road. He explained that one alternative passes just east of the airport; proceeds north roughly paralleling US 61 while crossing Goad Road, Verner Road, and Arkabutla Dam Road to near Robinsonville; and then turns east to parallel SR 304. Of the two alternatives under consideration in this area, he advised this alternative is closer to Tunica and provides the better access to the casinos at Robinsonville. Mr. Shirley advised the other alternative crosses Prichard Road farther east at a point near SR 3.

For the alternative closer to Tunica that crosses Verner Road, Mr. Shirley commented there is not much room to adjust the location of the alternative in this area because of the following limitations.

- The crossing of Prichard Road needs to remain west of Oak Grove Church.
- The crossing of Verner Road needs to be east of the Verner Road Park and west of a large ditch to keep the alternative as far west of Bonds Road as possible.

Mr. Shirley then discussed the potential residential displacements if the crossing of Verner Road remains in its current location. He advised if Verner Road was taken over I-69, the residents between the park and the large ditch were potential displacements. This amounted to two permanent residents and four mobile home residents. Mr. Shirley advised it would probably be better to take Verner Road over the interstate for the following reasons.

- For this alternative, it is proposed that a continuous landscaped earthen mound will be added at the right of way line to lessen the I-69 visual and noise impacts to residents in the Bonds and Verner Road area.
- For the landscaped area to be as effective as possible in reducing the noise level, Verner Road should go over the interstate.
- Over time, the expansion joints in bridges can become loose. An impact noise then occurs when trucks cross over the joints. Since there would be less traffic on Verner Road than the interstate, there is less potential for this type impact noise becoming a problem by taking Verner Road over the interstate.

Mr. Leslie Rankin, MDOT Second District Right of Way contact, stated that MDOT had relocation specialists at the meeting to address any questions on relocation and acquisition.

Mr. Cecil Vick further discussed the relocation and acquisition of properties. Mr. Vick stated that the intent of relocation is to put the person in a similar or better condition than they were in before. Mr. Vick stressed that this project may not be built for several years and that the local people should not alter their lives or plans based on the location of any proposed alignments.

The meeting moved to an informal format where the attendees could view the mapping displays for the alternatives and discuss their relocation type questions with the right of way specialists.

Some of the concerns discussed included access to the interstate, access to property, relocation assistance and potential noise and aesthetic impacts along the interstate. The mapping display of the Verner Road area provided the approximate locations of manufactured and brick homes that were within the proposed 450 foot wide right of way for the alternative that crosses Verner Road. Several people were in attendance at the meeting who either owned or rented homes that would be impacted by the alternative that crosses Verner Road.

### **Tunica, Coahoma, and Bolivar counties Archaeological Finds, Adjustment in Alternative made in March of 2003**

Coastal Environments discovered 11 archaeological sites impacted by alternatives in portions of these three counties. If possible, Coastal Environments recommended the alternatives be adjusted to avoid or lessen the impact on these sites. The adjustments that Neel-Schaffer was able to make did not impact other unknown archaeological sites based on a follow-up survey conducted by Coastal Environments.

### **Newsletter Mailout on April 3, 2003**

In preparation for the next series of identical public meetings and to make people who had expressed an interest in this project aware of its status, over 650 copies of a newsletter were mailed on April 3, 2003. Those mailed copies of this newsletter, shown on Figure \_\_\_\_\_ included people who had attended one or more of the public meetings, as well as Federal, State, and local governmental contacts.

### **Special Follow-up Meeting at Ray Brooks School near Benoit on April 30, 2003**

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the consultant team conducted this special follow-up meeting at Ray Brooks

School in Superintendent Dr. Suzanne Hawley's office. The primary discussions at the previous meeting concerned the crossings of SR 1 southwest of Benoit, and a request to study a crossing of SR 1 farther southwest of Benoit at Lake Vista. Some of the attendees at the previous meeting believed the Lake Vista crossing has the best soil conditions, the least environmental impacts, and the least negative impacts on farming operations. They also believed from the common point on the SIU 12 study near Eutaw Landing, a Lake Vista crossing of SR 1 could be accomplished by extending the Eutaw Landing tangent to the southeast. Then, after crossing SR 1 at Lake Vista, the requested alternative could turn east and then northeast to cross SR 448 at the same location as a crossing being used by one of the alternatives undergoing study. After the requests made at the previous meeting were analyzed, it was decided the crossing of SR 1 at Lake Vista merited study.

#### Purpose of Special Follow-up Benoit Meeting on April 30, 2003

There were two meeting locations chosen for the Third Series of Public Meetings scheduled for April 30-May 1, 2003, in Cleveland and Clarksdale respectively. Since the Lake Vista crossing was one of the three alternative crossings that would be presented to the public for comments at the meeting in Cleveland that evening, it was appropriate to schedule the follow-up meeting at Benoit. Everyone that attended the previous meeting on January 29<sup>th</sup> was invited to this follow-up meeting. Because making changes west of the crossing of SR 1 will impact the adjacent study on SIU 12, the SIU 12 contacts with HNTB and the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department were invited to this follow-up meeting.

The second purpose of the meeting concerned the Cleveland – Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce and other community leaders near Benoit. The Chamber has been actively involved in the Great River Bridge project since its conception. Because it is likely that I-69 will use the Great River Bridge crossing of the Mississippi River on SIU 12, this group also needed to be advised of the history behind the alternative crossings of SR 1 that would be presented at the meeting in Cleveland that evening. By inviting this group to the follow-up meeting, they would have an opportunity to ask questions, express any concerns, and make comments prior to the meeting in Cleveland that evening. The appropriate members and officials of the Chamber, as well as other community leaders they deemed appropriate, were invited to the meeting by the Chamber.

#### Attendees at Special Benoit Meeting on April 30, 2003

There were 26 people who were registered as attendees at this meeting. Of the 26 people, nine were representatives of either the SIU 11 or SIU 12 project teams. The remaining 17 people were farmers, Chamber officials, City of Cleveland officials, Bolivar County officials or Ray Brooks School officials. The minutes for this meeting are contained in the **Appendix**.

#### Welcome at Special Benoit Meeting on April 30, 2003

Mr. Claiborne Barnwell, the MDOT Environmental and Location Division Engineer, provided a welcoming statement and briefly discussed the purpose of the meeting. He then turned the program over to Mr. Jimmy Shirley of the consultant team.

### Presentation at Special Benoit Meeting on April 30, 2003

Mr. Shirley discussed the three alternative crossings of SR 1 that HNTB selected for the eastern limit of their adjacent environmental and location study on SIU 12. Mr. Shirley advised the environmental document for the SIU 12 study would state that the eventual crossing of SR 1 would be determined by the study to the east on SIU 11. Mr. Shirley then discussed how the SIU 11 study began by using the SIU 12 crossing alternatives of SR 1, but as the engineering and environmental studies for SIU 11 progressed adjustments were needed in the SR 1 crossing alternatives. The following describes his discussions.

- The HNTB crossing location of SR 1 north of Benoit was eliminated from further detailed study because it was too far out of direction to proceed southeast and cross Litton Road prior to the current western limits of the Dahomey NWR.
- The HNTB crossing location of SR 1 just south of Downtown Benoit was eliminated because it had too many negative natural and human environmental impacts to connect with the remaining alternative alignment corridors to the east that are undergoing study.
- The HNTB crossing location of SR 1, southwest of Benoit and just south of Ray Brooks School, was adjusted south to the first curve in SR 1 south of the school. The adjustment in this crossing point was needed to avoid impacting the expansion of the school's athletic fields, and to connect with the SIU 11 study alternatives proceeding east from Benoit.
- The SIU 11 recommended SR 1 crossing location alternatives are just north of Ray Brooks School, at the first curve south of Ray Brooks School, and further south of the school at a point known as Lake Vista.

Mr. Shirley advised the attendees that based on initial environmental and engineering studies, as well as a field inspection, it was determined the SR 1 crossing at Lake Vista appears to be a viable alternative to connect the HNTB study on SIU 12 with the SIU 11 study. He explained the SIU 11 alternative crossings of SR 1 just north of the school and just south of the school connect to SIU 12 on a shared tangent between Lake Bolivar and Eutaw Landing. Mr. Shirley explained the Lake Vista alternative would use a new tangent proceeding southeast from Eutaw Landing across Lake Bolivar. He advised the attendees that an aerial photography mapping display was available for them to view these alternatives recommending for further study in the Eutaw Landing, Lake Bolivar, Ray Brooks School, and Benoit areas. He concluded his remarks by informing the attendees that these were the SR 1 crossing alternatives that would be presented to the public at the meeting in Cleveland later that day.

### Questions, Comments, Concerns & Responses at Special Benoit Meeting

While seated and in a formal type setting, some of the attendees asked questions, made comments, and expressed concerns. The following were the primary questions, comments, or concerns expressed and any response that needed documenting to those questions, comments or concerns.

- Some of the major farmers in the area expressed their appreciation that the Lake Vista alternative was recommended to be added to the SIU 11 study.
- The Cleveland – Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce representatives expressed concern that adding the Lake Vista alternative would delay obtaining a Record of Decision (ROD) for the HNTB study on SIU 12. The Chamber representatives advised they hope to obtain I-69 funding to supplement or in lieu of Great River Bridge funding

for the Mississippi River crossing. They wanted assurance that adding the Lake Vista alternative would not delay obtaining the ROD on the SIU 12 study so the Great River Bridge construction could begin as soon as possible.

RESPONSE: The state highway officials from Arkansas and Mississippi advised they believed this could be worked out; however, they emphasized they could not say that for certain to the group today.

FOLLOW-UP: Some of the Chamber representatives were not satisfied with the highway officials' response.

### **Special Meeting in Rosedale held during the afternoon at the Court House on April 30, 2003**

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the consultant team conducted this special meeting in the West Bolivar County Courthouse at Rosedale to discuss the alternatives under consideration for widening SR 8 to four lanes between Rosedale and Cleveland as part of this I-69 Study on SIU 11.

SR 8 is a two-lane, two-lane highway over the approximately 18 miles from SR 1 at Rosedale to the western limits of Cleveland. The portion of SR 8 through Cleveland is a five-lane section, and the MDOT has location and environmental approval to widen SR 8 to four lanes from the eastern limits of Cleveland east to Ruleville in Sunflower County.

Regardless of the side of Cleveland on which I-69 has its interchange with SR 8, the MDOT decided SR 8 needed widening to four lanes between SR 1 at Rosedale and Cleveland. The reason the MDOT made this decision was to satisfy the expected intermodal connectivity needs that SR 8 would have associated with freight traffic between the Mississippi River Port and Industrial Park at Rosedale and Cleveland. At the request of the MDOT, the I-69 SIU 11 study team agreed to conduct the necessary environmental and engineering studies to obtain the environmental clearance for widening this section of SR 8 to four lanes as part of the SIU 11 Study.

The alternatives recommended for further study to accomplish the widening of SR 8 were to be presented to the public at the meeting in Cleveland during the evening of April 30, 2003. The purpose of this meeting at Rosedale was to provide the community leaders, Cleveland Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce officials, local elected officials, and concerned citizens advance notice of the alternatives that would be presented for further study at the meeting that evening in Cleveland. Invitations to the Rosedale meeting were provided by the Chamber.

There were 22 people who were registered as attendees at this meeting. Of the 22 people, 10 were representatives of the SIU 11 project team, MDOT, or FHWA. The remaining 12 people were City of Rosedale officials, Chamber officials, City of Cleveland officials, Bolivar County officials, and concerned citizens. The meeting minutes are contained in the **Appendix**.

### Welcome at Special Rosedale Meeting

Mr. Claiborne Barnwell, the MDOT Environmental and Location Division Engineer, provided a welcoming statement and briefly discussed the purpose of the meeting. He then turned the program over to Mr. Jimmy Shirley of the consultant team.

### Presentation at Special Rosedale Meeting

Mr. Shirley advised the group that aerial photography mapping displays of alternatives for widening SR 8 to four lanes were available for the group to view, ask questions, and make comments. He also advised the attendees the same mapping displays would be presented to the public at the meetings scheduled for later that day in Cleveland and the following day in Clarksdale. Before asking the attendees at the Rosedale meeting to view the alternatives, which were placed flat on tables, Mr. Shirley provided the attendees the following overview of the alternatives beginning at SR 1 and proceeding east to the western limits of Cleveland.

- There are two alternatives for the intersection at SR 1. Both of the alternatives would widen SR 8 to five lanes with the center lane functioning as a shared lane for left turning traffic. The only difference in the two alternatives is one alternative keeps the SR 1 intersection in its current location and the other alternative relocates the SR 1 intersection to the south so that SR 8 and the State Park access are directly opposite each other. Since the driveway to the convenience store/restaurant is located directly opposite SR 8, the alternative that maintains the current location of the SR 1 intersection would not require relocating the business. However, the offset in the state park access, which is south of the convenience store/restaurant and on the same side of SR 1, would have to be shifted south outside of the limits of the new SR 8 intersection with SR 1. The alternative for relocating the SR 1 intersection to the south would probably require relocating the convenience store/restaurant.
- From the eastern limits of the SR 1 intersection to slightly east of the access to the industrial park, the only alternative is widening SR 8 to five lanes with the center lane functioning as a shared lane for left turning traffic. The widening would be centered on the existing centerline of SR 8.
- From slightly east of the access to the industrial park to the slightly west of Riverside Fertilizer Association, the only alternative is widening SR 8 to five lanes. East of the industrial park intersection, the widening would transition from being placed equal distance on each side of the current centerline to where all the widening would be placed on the north side west of Riverside Fertilizer Association.
- At Riverside Fertilizer Association, the five-lane section would transition to a four-lane divided section with the new lanes being added on the north side of the existing lanes. The new lanes would continue on the north side of the existing lanes to curve near the electric substation. Using the curve near the electric substation to make the transition, the new lanes would be added on the south side of the existing lanes after exiting the curve. The new lanes would continue to be added on the south side of the existing lanes to the crossing of the Bogue Phalia located west of Pace. This will avoid the abandoned landfill, and it is the only alternative recommended for study in this segment.
- From the crossing of the Bogue Phalia to natural gas pipeline substation just west of the Bolivar County Correctional Facility the following three alternatives were presented.

- ❖ Immediately after crossing the Bogue Phalia, one alternative is for the four lane divided type section to transition to a five lane section along the existing alignment of SR 8. After completing the transition to the five lane section, all the widening necessary to provide the five lane would be added to the south of the existing lanes between the fire tower west of Pace and the apartment complexes that border SR 8 to the south in the middle portion of Pace. This will avoid impacting the Herbie's Transportation Complex that is presently under construction to the north of SR 8 and east of the fire tower. West of the apartment complexes a transition of the widening, from all the widening being placed to the south of SR 8 to all the widening being placed to the north of SR 8, would occur. This transition of the widening is necessary to minimize the impacts to the apartment complex and most of the built-up area of Pace that is located to the south of SR 8. Near the eastern limits of Pace, another transition of the widening would occur that when completed would result in all the widening being placed to the south of SR 8. This will avoid impacting the two natural gas pipeline substations that are located to the north of SR 8 between Pace and the correctional facility.
- ❖ The second alternative for accomplishing the widening of SR 8 from west of Pace to the Bolivar County Correctional Facility is a four-lane divided facility. The concept for the transitioning necessary to provide a four-lane divided section is the same as the concept described above the five-lane.
- ❖ The third alternative for accomplishing the widening at Pace is a four-lane divided alternative on new location to the north of SR 8. This alternative would rejoin SR 8 east of Pace where the new lanes would be added to the south of SR 8. A four-lane divided section would continue to the natural gas pipeline substation located just west of the correctional facility.
- Between the natural gas pipeline substation just west of the correctional facility and the correctional facility, the following two alternatives were presented.
  - ❖ The first alternative is to transition the four-lane divided section to a five-lane section. When the transition is completed, the resulting five-lane section would have all the widening added to the south of the existing lanes.
  - ❖ The second alternative is to maintain the five-lane section with all the widening being added to the south of the existing lanes.
- From just west of the correctional facility to the western limits of Cleveland, the only recommended alternative is a five-lane concept with all the widening being added to the south of the existing lanes. Near the western limits of Cleveland a transition would occur to connect to the existing five-lane section.

#### Informal Question and Answer Period

After Mr. Shirley completed his description of the proposed alternatives, Mr. Barnwell and Mr. Shirley addressed some general questions. The attendees were invited to view the mapping of the alternatives that were placed on the tables, and to discuss any questions, comments, or concerns they had about the project with members of the project team. The attendees were also

encouraged to submit any comments they have about the project in writing using the comment form that was provided at the meeting.

#### Comment Forms or Letters Received on Special Rosedale Meeting

None of the three comments received provided support or objections to the alternative plans recommended for further study to accomplish the widening of SR 8 to four lanes between Rosedale and Cleveland. One comment advised the widening of SR 8 to four lanes is a great idea and much needed. However, the cost of this project should not be a part of the I-69 feasibility study since it is not essential to the route determination of I-69.

#### **Third Series of Public Meetings held at Cleveland and Clarksdale respectively on April 30-May 1, 2003**

The purpose of the third set of citizen's information workshops was to present to the public for input the I-69 SIU 11 Alternatives and Connecting Roads recommended for study in the Draft EIS and the public the alternatives for widening SR 8 in Bolivar County to four lanes between Rosedale and Cleveland.

Using the project contact list, approximately 650 post card invitations were mailed to the public and agency contacts that had expressed interest in the project. A Press Release was also placed in the area newspapers as another means of inviting the local and area citizenry to the meetings.

#### Planning Approach Used for the Meetings

Information on the refined 450 feet wide alternative corridors recommended for study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was presented at these meetings using the same format as the previous two citizen's information workshops. In addition, information on the alternatives recommended for further study to widen SR 8 in Bolivar County to four lanes between SR 1 at Rosedale and Cleveland was presented at these meetings. Large aerial photography mapping displays on the alternative corridors recommended for detail study were placed on tables and other displays were placed on easels for the public to view, ask questions, and make comments. At each meeting brief presentations were made by the MDOT Environmental Division and the consultant team.

Steps were taken at these meetings to assist the public in understanding that the selection of a Preferred Alternative must also address connecting road needs, in at least one direction, from every I-69 interchange location to the existing highway system. This was necessary to address the probable eventual construction of I-69 in short segments between interchange locations, and the necessity of providing a route capable of accommodating truck traffic access needs. In some instances the connecting road is already built to accommodate the posted maximum allowable truck weight limit of 80,000 pounds. In other instances, the connecting road would need improving or upgrading. In others, a connecting road does not exist, and a new road, which the project team identifies as a spur, needs to be provided.

#### Project Approach of Studying Alternatives in Three Separate Sections

To present the alternatives recommended for further study in the Draft EIS at these meetings, the project was divided into a Southern, Central, and Northern Section.



In the Southern Section, three alternatives were presented for further study. Those three alternatives in the Southern Section were a Western Alternative, a Central Alternative, and the Eastern Alternative. The shared southern terminus for the Western, Central, and Eastern Alternative Corridors in the Southern Section is a point in Bolivar County on the adjacent SIU 12 study east of the proposed Great River Bridge near Eutaw Landing. This shared southern terminus is southwest of Benoit, and west of Lake Bolivar and SR 1. The shared northern terminus for the three alternative corridors is the New Africa Road Interchange on the Clarksdale Bypass in Coahoma County. The Western Alternative and the Eastern Alternative are entirely on new location, and the Central Alternative uses as much of US 61 as possible between the Town of Merigold and the Bolivar/Coahoma County Line.

In the Central Section, only one alternative was presented for further study and that alternative was referred to as the Central Alternative. The Central Alternative is located from the New Africa Road Interchange on the Clarksdale Bypass in Coahoma County to a point on US 61 in Coahoma County approximately four miles south of the Coahoma/Tunica County Line.

In the Northern Section, three alternatives were presented for further study. Those three alternatives were a Western Alternative, a Central Alternative, and the Eastern Alternative. The Northern Section is bounded to the south by the northern termini of the Central Section in Coahoma County and bounded to the north by the southern portion of a spur, currently under construction, which will connect existing SR 304 with new SR 304 in Tunica County.

Because there were several points in the Southern Section and the Northern Section where alternatives either overlap or where alternatives can be connected, there are more than three possible alternatives in the Southern and Northern Sections. However, for presentation purposes at the meeting, displays were developed for only the three general corridors previously mentioned for those two sections. The alternative(s) contained in the Northern, Central and Southern Sections presented at the meetings are described below.

#### Western Alternative in the Southern Section

From Eutaw Landing to west of Lake Bolivar and SR 1, the Western Alternative uses a shared tangent with the Central Alternative. The Western and Central Alternatives separate near Lake Bolivar and the Western Alternative's turn to the southeast results in a crossing of SR 1 just north of Ray Brooks School. The Western Alternative then continues southeast before turning to the northeast to cross SR 448 near the southeastern limits of Benoit. The Alternative then proceeds east on a path south of Litton Road until near the crossing of the Bogue Phalia where the Alternative turns north to cross Litton Road. The Alternative continues north and then joins the Central Alternative east of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge and south of SR 446. The two alternatives continue north on the same alignment until after they cross SR 8 west of Cleveland where they separate. The Western Alternative turns to the north and remains on new location following a path between US 61 and SR 1 to near the Bolivar/Coahoma County Line where the Alternative begins a turn to the northeast and then to the east. The Western Alternative joins the Central Alternative southwest of Clarksdale and after these two alternatives join they continue east to cross US 61 and join the Clarksdale Bypass near the New Africa Road Interchange.

### Central Alternative in Southern Section

The Central Alternative and the Western Alternative are joined and follow the same easterly path from Eutaw Landing to west of Lake Bolivar and SR 1 where the two alternatives separate. The Central Alternative turns to the southeast and crosses SR 1 in the curve just south of Ray Brooks School. Continuing its southeasterly path the Alternative turns to the northeast near SR 448 to join the Eastern Alternative. After crossing SR 448 southeast of Benoit near a cotton gin, the two alternatives turn east on a path north of SR 448 until crossing the Bogue Phalia where the two alternatives separate. The Central Alternative turns north to cross Litton Road and join the Western Alternative east of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge. The two alternatives continue north crossing SR 446 and SR 8 west of Cleveland. Just north of SR 8, the Central Alternative leaves the Western Alternative and follows a northeast path that connects the Central Alternative to US 61 near Merigold. Between Merigold and the Bolivar/Coahoma County Line, the Central Alternative continues north using the US 61 corridor as much as possible. Just north of the Bolivar/Coahoma County Line, the Alternative proceeds northeast and then east to join the Western Alternative southwest of Clarksdale. The two alternatives then continue east to cross US 61 and connect with the Clarksdale Bypass near the New Africa Road Interchange.

### Eastern Alternative in Southern Section

From Eutaw Landing and northwest of Lake Bolivar, the Eastern Alternative leaves the Western and Central alternatives and proceeds on a southeast path resulting in a crossing of Lake Bolivar and SR 1 near an area known as Lake Vista. After crossing SR 1, the Alternative turns to the east and then the northeast to join the Central Alternative southwest of SR 448. Following a northeast path the two alternatives cross SR 448 southeast of Benoit near a cotton gin. The two alternatives then turn east on a path to paralleling SR 448 to the north until the crossing of the Bogue Phalia where the two alternatives separate. The Eastern Alternative proceeds east to cross US 61 just north of Shaw and turns north to cross SR 8 east of Cleveland. The Eastern Alternative remains on new location following a northerly path that takes the Alternative just west of the State Penal Farm until the Alternative joins the Clarksdale Bypass near the New Africa Road Interchange.

### Central Alternative in Central Section

The Central Alternative uses the Clarksdale Bypass to north of SR 6 near Lyon where the Alternative proceeds northeast on new location to avoid the build-up along the concurrent section of US 49 and US 61 between Lyon and Eagles Nest Road. The Alternative rejoins the concurrent section of US 49 and US 61 north of Eagles Nest Road near the Clarksdale Airport and Swan Lake, and the Alternative continues to use concurrent section of US 49-US 61 to approximately four miles south of the Coahoma/Tunica County Line.

### Western Alternative in Northern Section

Approximately four miles south of the Coahoma/Tunica County Line is the separation point for the Central and Northern sections. The Western Alternative in the Northern Section proceeds north along the concurrent US 49-US 61 section and then along US 61 beyond the US 49 intersection into Tunica County to a point just south of the Crenshaw Road intersection. The alternative then proceeds to the northeast on new location to near Dubbs Road where the alternative turns to the north and then to the northeast to cross Dubbs Road and roughly parallel

US 61. The alternative continues north paralleling US 61 across SR 4, Prichard Road, and Arkabutla Dam Road before turning to the east just south of SR 304. The alternative crosses Kirby Road in a manner that roughly parallels SR 304, and the alternative continues to the east paralleling SR 304 across SR 3 and the railroad before turning north to cross SR 304 and join the Spur.

#### Central Alternative in Northern Section

Approximately four miles south of the Coahoma/Tunica County Line, the Central and Eastern alternatives proceed northeast on new location. Between the crossings of Crenshaw Road and Dubbs Road the Central Alternative leaves the Eastern Alternative to proceed north on a path that joins the Central Alternative with the Western Alternative prior to the crossing of Dubbs Road. The two alternatives remain concurrent to north of Prichard Road where the Central Alternative makes a turn to the east. After crossing SR 3 and the railroad, the Alternative turns to the north to join the Eastern Alternative prior to crossing Arkabutla Dam Road. The two alternatives remain concurrent crossing SR 304 and then joining the Spur at the northern limits of the study.

#### Eastern Alternative in Northern Section

The Eastern Alternative in the Northern Section is concurrent with the Central Alternative from four miles south of the Coahoma/Tunica County Line to south of Dubbs Road where the Alternative turns to the northeast. After proceeding northeast to cross Dubbs Road and Sarah Road, the Alternative turns to the north to cross SR 4 at Little Texas and then Beatline Road. After crossing Beatline Road, the alternative turns to the northeast crossing Prichard Road, SR 3, and the railroad before turning north to join the Central Alternative south of Arkabutla Dam Road. From south of Arkabutla Dam Road to the Spur, the Eastern Alternative is concurrent with the Central Alternative.

#### Viewing Displays and Project Handouts Provided at Meetings

Aerial photography mappings displays, which could be placed flat on tables for viewing at these meetings, were prepared for the Western, Central, and Eastern Alternatives in the Southern Section; the Central Alternative in the Central Section; and, the Western, Central, and Eastern Alternatives in the Northern Section. This resulted in seven viewing locations for the I-69 alternatives. It was expected that at some locations along the corridor there would be considerable public interest. Therefore, two mapping displays of the same alternative were provided at several of the displays areas. The aerial photography mapping identified property ownership, potential frontage road locations, interchange locations, connector roads to the existing highway system at the interchange locations, and other natural and human environmental information. This information was provided on the mapping displays to enable the public to identify the location of an alternative relative to their questions, comments, or concerns. At each of the seven viewing locations, a map was placed on an easel to identify the alternative displayed on the table.

The environmental and location study for the widening of SR 8 to four lanes in Bolivar County from Rosedale to Cleveland is included in this study. Two identical aerial photography mapping displays of the alternatives for accomplishing this widening were also available for public

viewing and comments. The Press Release for the meetings stated information on the widening alternatives of SR 8 to four-lanes would be available for viewing and discussion.

Other displays on easels included a project schedule, typical roadway section with frontage roads, and a list of the evaluation criteria for this Environmental Impact Statement under the headings of engineering issues, impact on the natural environment, impact on the human environment, and public opinion.

Each attendee was provided a packet containing the project brochure, a color coded map of the seven I-69 alternative corridors and connecting road needs that were presented at the meetings, and a comment form. A figure in the text is a copy of the color coded map of the seven I-69 alternative corridors and connecting road needs that was presented to the attendees at the meeting.

The minutes for these two meetings is contained in the **Appendix**.

#### Cleveland Meeting Registration, Discussion Items, and Comments

A total of 78 people registered their attendance at the meeting in Cleveland, and 13 comment forms were received from 12 of the attendees (one attendee submitted two comment forms). The following were the primary topics discussed at the Cleveland meeting.

- The history that led to the three alternative locations for crossing SR 1 south of Benoit.
- The probable elimination from further serious study of the alternative crossing of SR 1 just north of Benoit. The elimination is probable because the crossing is out of direction for connecting to the study alternatives east of SR 1 that pass south of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge.
- The probable elimination from further serious study of the far-west alternative between Benoit and the crossing of SR 444 in Bolivar County. The elimination is probable because it bisects the planned westward expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge to Mississippi River.
- The information provided at the seven aerial photography mapping display areas for the I-69 alternatives and the one aerial photography mapping display area for the alternatives to accomplish the widening of SR 8 to four lanes.
- Environmental constraints, engineering constraints, drainage ditches, and locations of changes in property ownership contributed to alternatives bisecting some farmland. When bisecting of farmland occurred, efforts were made to leave extremely large or very small tracts of land on each side of the alternative. The property retained by the owner after the I-69 right of way was acquired could then hopefully be large enough to farm or it would be so small that the remaining property would be an uneconomical remnant.
- To lessen the impacts on farmland access, grade separation bridges or interchanges are proposed on a maximum spacing of approximately two miles. In addition, frontage roads are proposed where economically feasible and practical.

There continued to be widespread support for the I-69 project at the meeting in Cleveland, and the initial response expressed by the attendees on the widening of SR 8 to four lanes was also very favorable. Opinions continue to differ as to whether it is best for I-69 to cross SR 8 west or east of Cleveland. The people supporting the SR 8 crossing east of Cleveland generally have Sunflower County interests or they have interests in farmland that is divided by the Western and

Central Alternatives, which cross SR 8 at the same location west of Cleveland. Most people with Bolivar County interests continue to support the crossing of SR 8 west of Cleveland.

The following summarizes any revisions or modifications that were suggested in the 13 written comments received on the alternatives recommended for further study.

- One comment expressed support for the Western Alternative in the Northern Section and the Central Alternative in the Southern Section. That comment also contained suggestions for possible future connectors or connector improvements to I-69. He believed consideration should be given in future studies for the need of a connection to relocated US 82 near Greenville. He believed the potential for an upgraded SR 448 from I-69 southeast to US 49W at Indianola should be considered to provide a more direct route from Jackson, MS to Little Rock, AR. He believed a Spur might be eventually needed to address possible development and increased accessibility for the Commerce Landing resorts.

RESPONSE: These requests were beyond the scope of this I-69 study. They may need to be reviewed more seriously in the future, but they are not critical at this time in determining a Preferred Alternative for this study.

- One comment was from a landowner whose family owned property adjoining US 61 to the east where the Eastern Alternative crosses and interchanges with US 61. If at all possible, he asked that the East Alternative, east of US 61, be moved to his family's south property line.

RESPONSE: If the Eastern Alternative becomes the Preferred Alternative a slight adjustment in the Alternative can and will be made to lessen the impact to farmland at this location.

#### Clarksdale Meeting Registration, Discussion Items, and Comments

In Clarksdale, a total of 64 registered their attendance at the meeting, and seven comment forms were received from attendees or agencies represented at the meeting. The same format was followed at this meetings as the format that was used the previous evening in Cleveland.

There continued to be widespread overall support for the I-69 project at the meeting in Clarksdale. Because of the distance from Clarksdale to Cleveland and Rosedale, most of the attendees were not that interested in the widening of SR 8 to four lanes between Cleveland and Rosedale. However, they appeared to recognize the benefits the Mississippi Delta could achieve from widening that segment of SR 8 and they did not express any opposition to the project. Most of the people attending the meeting had either Coahoma or Tunica County interests, and they generally supported the alternatives in those two counties that are recommended for detail study in the Draft EIS.

The following summarizes any revisions or modifications that were suggested in the 7 written comments received on the alternatives recommended for further study.

- The person believed an interchange should be added to the Central Alternative near Duncan, and that the Merigold – Drew Road should be upgraded to the east to Drew for the Eastern Alternative. This person supported the Western Alternative in the Northern Section because it provides an interchange close to Robinsonville for casino traffic.

RESPONSE: The requested interchange near Duncan for the Central Alternative was added. The request to add the upgrade of the Merigold – Drew Road for the Eastern

Alternative was not added because it was not required for the constructability of the Eastern Alternative and because of the additional cost it would add to the analysis of the Eastern Alternative. The Eastern Alternative provides access to Drew for northbound I-69 traffic via SR 8 East to US 49W North, and the Eastern Alternative provides access to Drew for southbound I-69 traffic via US 49 to US 49W.

- There were two comments from members of the same family whose farmland is located in the Southern Section between Litton Road and SR 448. They asked that consideration be given to moving the north tangent, used by the Western Alternative, farther south to a property line. This move would prevent bisecting their farmland. They also stated their belief that the south tangent between Litton Road and SR 448, used by the Central and Eastern Alternatives, provides better soil conditions for constructing a highway than the north tangent.

RESPONSE: Based on future archaeological studies for the best locations to cross the Bogue Phalia and based on a review on the alignment for the section of the Western Alternative between Benoit and the Bogue Phalia, it was decided that moving the tangent to the property line provided an overall improvement for the human and natural environment. Therefore, the requested adjustment was made.

#### Non-Attendee Comments on Cleveland and Clarksdale Meetings

There were 33 written comments received from people who did not register as attendees at either of the public meetings held April 30-May 1, 2003. The following summarizes any revisions or modifications that were suggested in the 33 written comments received on the alternatives recommended for further study.

- Four comments were from the Aguzzi family, and their comments supported a crossing of SR 8 east of Cleveland. Another member of the Aguzzi family registered his attendance at the meeting in Cleveland, and his comments supporting the crossing of SR 8 east of Cleveland were previously provided in these minutes. The following were the reasons these four members of the Aguzzi family provided for also supporting a crossing of SR 8 east of Cleveland. The most productive farmland is on the west side; this is an agricultural community and it does not make sense to dissect the best yielding land. The crossing of SR 8 west of Cleveland would traverse a large part of our property and require us to double our equipment headquarters, etc., and to have both sides of the interstate set up adequately for farm production; this would add a financial burden that would not be covered by land payments alone. There are more businesses on the east side of Cleveland to accommodate the interstate motorist. In terms of soil fertility, the land being utilized by the eastern route is much less rich. The routes, other than the eastern route, pass through key resting and feeding points for ducks. In Bolivar County, the Central/West Corridor passes through areas that are the most active in wildlife habitat management. The economic impact of all routes will be equally beneficial. Travelers will be enticed to the local communities equally no matter which route is selected. My family has been farming in the regions noted for the Central/West Corridor for many years, and I-69 will completely divide a lifetime of work.

RESPONSE: The consultant team reviewed the Western and Central Corridor to determine if adjustments in the alignments were needed, representatives of the MDOT met with members on the Aguzzi Family during the week of May 19, 2003, and

representatives of the MDOT and the consultant team met with a Bolivar County delegation on June 20, 2003. met with members of the Aguzzi Family to discuss their concerns. The Aguzzi Family owns some property just south of Litton Road and several random large parcels of property between Litton Road and SR 8. The following became controls in the locations of the Western and Central Corridors in the Southern Section between the crossings of the Bogue Phalia and SR 8 west of Cleveland.

- ❖ Because of the possible southern expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to Litton Road, the alternatives for crossing the Bogue Phalia must be south of Litton Road.
- ❖ Two locations for crossing the Bogue Phalia south of Litton Road were determined. Both of the crossing locations are between Litton Road and SR 448.
- ❖ The distances between Litton Road and the north crossing of the Bogue, the north crossing of the Bogue and the south crossing of the Bogue, and the south crossing of the Bogue and SR 448 are approximately equal.
- ❖ The West Alternative uses the north crossing of the Bogue and the Central and Eastern alternatives use the south crossing of the Bogue.
- ❖ After both crossings of the Bogue, a gradual curve to the north was required in order for the Western and Central Alternatives to interchange with Litton Road east of the Litton Chapel Methodist Church and cemetery and west of the Poplar Grove Church.
- ❖ The crossing of Litton Road between these two churches and the selected corridor for these two alternatives to proceed north was chosen for the following reasons.
  - There is a natural gas pipeline crossing of Litton Road just east of Poplar Grove Church.
  - East of the pipeline crossing the Shaw-Skene Road intersects Litton Road. The Shaw-Skene Road is a major north-south county road with some built-up of homes and farm headquarters located along both sides.
  - Although Litton Road would be relocated slightly at this interchange to provide a new connector to US 61, this is a good interchange location for the US 61 connector.
  - Continuing north of Litton Road on the gradual curve to the north allows the Western and Central alternatives to join their shared tangent prior to crossing Evans Road.
  - Yeager Road intersects Evans Road west of the point where the two alternatives join and continue north paralleling Yeager Road through the interchange location at SR 446.
  - The Yeager Road intersection with SR 446 would be just west of the western limits of this interchange.
  - Between the crossings of Litton Road and Yeager Road, major streams were kept to the outside of the corridors as much as possible, county roads were crossed at good angles as much as possible, grade separation bridges would be provided at some of the county road crossings, and frontage roads were provided at some locations and existing parallel county roads could be utilized at other locations to address bisected farmland.

- There is a crop dusting general aviation airport located in the southwest quadrant of Yeager Road intersection with Laughlin Road, which is one mile road north of SR 446. The SR 446 interchange location needed to be east of Yeager Road, near the western limits of Skene, and west of the Shaw-Skene Road to align with a crossing of Litton Road between Litton Methodist Chapel Church and Poplar Grove Church.
- ❖ With the Litton Road crossing and the SR 446 crossings as controls, the interchange crossing of SR 8 became the next control. The following items were taken into account in determining the recommended interchange location for SR 8 slightly east of the SR 8 intersection with the Shaw-Skene Road.
  - It needed to cross at a location near the western limits of Cleveland that would allow the Central and Western Alternatives to separate from their shared alignment north of the SR 8 interchange. The Central Alternative could then proceed northeast to join the new section of US 61 near Merigold, while the Western Alternative would proceed north on new location.
  - The county correctional facility, two natural gas pipeline substations, and some major drainage ditch crossings are located along SR 8 west of the Shaw-Skene Road intersection with SR 8.
  - The new water well and water tank for the Boyle-Skene Water Association, which is located to the west of the Shaw-Skene Road just south of the SR 8 intersection.
- ❖ The proposed crossing of SR 8 west of Cleveland will accommodate an interchange and provides good opportunity for economic development around the interchange.
- ❖ Taking into account the acceptable crossings of the Bogue Phalia; the available corridor space at the Litton Road crossing for an interchange, the requirements for an interchange at SR 446 and SR 8; and the alignment standards required for an interstate highway; the consultant team studied other options for the alternatives.
- ❖ One of the other options considered by the consultant team would move the crossing of Litton Road west of the Litton community. This alternative created a sharp curve from the crossing of the Bogue Phalia to the crossing of Litton Road, continuing north the option would create an interchange at SR 8 where the Bolivar County Correctional Facility would be located in the northeast quadrant, a natural gas pipeline substation in the northwest quadrant, and the interchange would be bordered and constrained by major drainage ditches. A SR 8 interchange at this location would be farther west of Cleveland and less desirable from an economic development viewpoint for the City and Bolivar County. Although the alternative corridor would lessen or avoid the impacts to property owned by the Aguzzi Family, it would not be in the best overall interests to the human and natural environments to use this other corridor.
- ❖ Another option considered was to use the current corridor, but shift the corridor to the northeast after crossing SR 446. This would lessen the impact to the property the Aguzzi Family owns between SR 446 and SR 8. The shift created a crossing of Shaw-Skene Road farther south of the



current alternative. The shift would create more residential relocatees and create a less desirable interchange location for SR 8. This change in alternative alignment could not be recommended.

- ❖ As stated previously environmental constraints, engineering constraints, drainage ditches, and locations of changes in property ownership contributed to alternatives bisecting some farmland. When bisecting of farmland occurred, efforts were made to leave extremely large or very small tracts of land on each side of the alternative and provide reasonable access to the bisected property. The property retained by the owner after the I-69 right of way was acquired could then hopefully be large enough to farm or it would be so small that the remaining property would be an uneconomical remnant. This is the philosophy that was followed on locating these two alternatives between Litton Road and the crossing of SR 8 west of Cleveland.
- One comment was from Mr. G.R. Harden and a map was attached to his letter. He wants the Western and Central Alternative moved west another couple of miles. Mr. Harden owns land north of the shared crossing of SR 8 used by the Western and Central Alternatives. After separating from the Western Alternative, the Central Alternative makes a turn to the northeast towards Merigold. After completing the turn, the Central Alternative goes through a portion of a new subdivision that Mr. Harden is developing. He advises the subdivision contains 19 lots and 9 two-acre lots that remain available. He also advises these lots sell for \$30,000.00 (thirty thousand dollars), and that since the meeting in Cleveland on May 1, 2003, he has lost two sales. Mr. Harden does not anticipate being able to sell any of the remainder of the lots unless this can be resolved. The shared alignment, used by the Western and Central Alternatives between their crossing of SR 8 and their separation point north of SR 8, travels through farm acreage that is either owned by Mr. Harden or farmed by him, and takes out two of his houses. There are several other houses that do not belong to Mr. Harden that would be impacted. He expressed his opposition to the location of the Western and Central Alternatives in this area, and he advised that if the route could go west another couple of miles there would be much lesser negative impact on this portion of the county.  
RESPONSE: The consultant team considered this requested and determined it was in the best interest of the human and natural environment to make a slight adjustment in the Western and Central Alternatives just north of their shared crossing of SR 8 west of Cleveland. The resulting adjustment substantially reduced the number of relocatees and lessened the impact on Mr. Harden's property. Only one new relocate was created by making the requested adjustment. By making this adjustment, the Central Alternative now passes through farmland to the north of Mr. Harden's subdivision.
- One comment supported an alternative in the Southern Section that would proceed north from Benoit and pass west of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge before turning northeast to connect with US 61 just south of Winstonville. (This suggested alternative would pass through land that the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge is considering acquiring for a westward expansion of the refuge to the Mississippi River.)  
RESPONSE: Because this would create an alternative that would be located in the planned westward expansion of the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge, the consultant team was unable to consider the request.
- One comment was from the County Engineer for Washington, Sharkey, and Issaquena Counties. His comment expressed opposition to the Great River Bridge being used for I-69. If the Great River Bridge is not built and if the US 82 Mississippi River Bridge is

used for I-69, he believes the people of the Delta would be better served and the construction costs would be less.

RESPONSE: Because the US 82 Greenville River Bridge is outside the limits of the SIU 11 Study for I-69, the consultant team was unable to consider this request.

### **Meeting on the I-69 access to the casinos at Robinsonville held at Noon on May 2, 2003**

This luncheon meeting was requested by the Tunica County Chamber of Commerce on behalf of several of the casinos located in the Robinsonville area. The purposes of the meeting held at Sam's Town casino were to discuss the proposed interchange locations in the Robinsonville area for the alternatives recommended for further study in the Draft EIS, and the manner in which the connecting roads at the proposed interchange locations would provide access to the casinos at Robinsonville. The minutes for this meeting, attended by approximately 10 people, are contained in the Appendix.

Mr. Penn Owen, Jr., opened the meeting by asking everyone to introduce themselves, and Mr. Owen led the discussions on the following items.

- The casinos represented at the meeting want to make sure their traffic, especially from the Memphis area, is provided good access from I-69.
- The casinos representatives support the proposed Arkabutla Dam Road Interchange on the Western Alternative.
- The casinos representatives favor the Western Alternative over the Central and Eastern Alternative in the north part of Tunica County.
- The casinos representatives are concerned about the manner in which the Western Alternative joins the spur, which connects existing SR 304 with the new section of SR 304 that is under construction.
- The casinos representatives are concerned that the proposed Western Alternative will either require their customers from the north to travel west on existing SR 304 through an at-grade railroad crossing or their customers will be required to continue on I-69 south to the Kirby Road interchange to exit. After exiting to the north at the Kirby Road interchange, this traffic from the north would then have to turn left at existing SR 304 to proceed west.
- The casino representatives believe the existing at-grade railroad crossing on SR 304 would require them to direct their traffic to the Kirby Road Interchange. However, they believe the left turn required for their casino traffic at SR 304 after proceeding north from the Kirby Road Interchange is a substantial change in the existing traffic pattern, and this would make directional signing for their customers more difficult.

Mr. Owen asked why the alternative originally proposed by the county, which crossed existing SR 304 between US 61 and SR 3, was eliminated. He wanted to know if this alternative could be reconsidered or what other options were available to address these concerns.

During the course of Mr. Barnwell's and Mr. Shirley's discussion of the above mentioned items, the following noteworthy items were either discussed or decided.

- The county's original alternative crossed SR 304 between US 61 and SR 3 on a very severe angle. The angle of the crossing was unacceptable for providing an interchange at SR 304. Changing the angle of the crossing was also unacceptable because of the

curves in the I-69 alignment that would be required to connect with the spur to the north and the Western Alternative to the south.

- The proposed Eastern and Central Alternatives would relocate existing SR 304 west of the SR 304 interchange location shared by these two alternatives. The new section of SR 304 west of the interchange would be located to the north of SR 304, bridge over the railroad, possibly interchange with SR 3 and then rejoin the existing five-lane section of SR 304.
- The proposed interchange locations for the Western Alternative would remain at Arkabutla Dam Road, Kirby Road, and existing SR 304. However, SR 304 would be improved west of the interchange for the Western Alternate in a similar manner to that proposed at the interchange for the Eastern and Central Alternatives.

The casino representatives were satisfied that implementing the changes in the Western Alternative will adequately address their concerns.

### **Bolivar County Archaeological Finds, Adjustment in Alternatives made in June of 2003**

Coastal Environments discovered ten archaeological sites impacted by alternatives in the southwest portion of Bolivar County. If possible, Coastal Environments recommended the alternatives be adjusted to avoid the sites. In response, Neel-Schaffer adjusted the alternatives to avoid or lessen the impacts on these sites. The adjustments performed by Neel-Schaffer on the alignments of the corridors did not impact unknown archaeological sites based on a follow-up survey conducted by Coastal Environments, and the adjustments made created improved alternatives from an archaeological viewpoint.

### **Special Cleveland – Bolivar County Meeting held at the MDOT Third District Office on June 20, 2003**

The City of Cleveland and Bolivar County requested this meeting to better understand how to address the complaints they were receiving from landowners about the impacts the Western and Central Alternatives would have on their property between Litton Road and SR 8 west of Cleveland.

The people representing the City of Cleveland and/or Bolivar County, the MDOT, and the consultant team are identified in the meeting minutes contained in the Appendix.

#### **Welcome and Opening Comments**

Mr. Walter Lyons welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited the Cleveland Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce representatives for their comments.

Mr. Scot Luth advised their group is routinely being asked why the Western and Central Alternatives divides so much farmland between Litton Road and the SR 8 interchange location west of Cleveland, which these two alternatives share. He stated they do not know how to answer this question and that he hoped they could obtain some information today to assist them in better answering the question.

### Explanation for Location of Western and Central Alternative in Question

The MDOT and the consultant team decided that Mr. Jimmy Shirley should address the question. There were tables in front of the chairs where the attendees were sitting. This sitting arrangement allowed the mapping displays of the Western and Central Alternatives between Benoit and Clarksdale to be placed flat on the tables in front of the attendees. By placing two sets of mapping on the tables, all the attendees were able to view the mapping as Mr. Shirley discussed the environmental and engineering factors that led to the recommended locations for the Western and Central Alternatives between Litton Road and the proposed SR 8 interchange location west of Cleveland.

The explanations provided by Mr. Shirley are in the meeting minutes contained in the Appendix. Those explanation as well as other explanations for the location of the Central and Western Alternatives in this relatively narrow corridor are also contained in this document under the RESPONSE to the comment sheets submitted by the Aguzzi Family after the Third Series of Public Meetings held on April 30 and May 1, 2003.

### Questions, Comments, and Closing

After providing the explanation for the location of the Western and Central Alternatives between Litton Road and SR 8, Mr. Walker and Mr. Shirley addressed some general questions concerning the impacts on the natural and human environment that could be caused by making changes in the alternatives between the existing controls on Litton Road, SR 446, and SR 8. Several attendees, representing Bolivar County interests, advised they understood these constraints. However, they were not sure how well they could relay this information and address future questions on this issue. The possibility of having a meeting in the future with people impacted by the current alternatives was discussed. The Bolivar County representatives expressed their appreciation for having the meeting, and advised they better understood the constraints that existed for the Western and Central Alternatives between Litton Road and SR 8 west of Cleveland.

### Status of Alternative Development Decisions Made by July of 2003

The following provides the status of the study of the alternatives as of July 2003.

- The concept of studying three alternatives in the Southern Section from Benoit to Clarksdale, one alternative in the Middle Section from Clarksdale to the north part of Coahoma County, and three alternatives in the Northern Section from the north part of Coahoma County to east of Robinsonville was finalized.
- The designation of the Central Alternative in the Northern Section was changed to overlap the Eastern Alternative in the south part of Tunica County and overlap the Western Alternative from near Dubbs Road to the northern end of the project. Refer to the map shown on Figure 2-3 for clarification.
- The connecting road and interchange concept that would be studied for these alternatives was nearly finalized.
- Most of the proposed interchanges are at U.S. highways, state routes, or major county roads. Maintenance of traffic and minimal disruption to the traffic on these crossing routes during the construction of the interchanges are important factors to consider. For these reasons, in most instances the decision was made to bridge the interstate over

these intersecting routes at interchange locations. A decision was needed to develop the plan profile grades for comparing the costs of alternatives.

- The grade separation bridge locations were finalized for crossing county roads. Grade separations were provided at most county roads, and in most instances the county roads were taken over the interstate. This approach meant only one bridge would be needed instead of the two bridges that would be required if the interstate was taken over the county roads.
- The alignments for the alternatives were developed to such a degree that only minor adjustments would be expected in the future based on the ongoing archaeological study.
- The noise and relocation studies were completed based on the finalized alignments.
- The frontage road concepts for all the alternatives were finalized.
- For new location alternatives, the alternatives followed and paralleled the county roads when possible. Recognizing the concept of taking most county roads over the interstate, the alternatives had to be kept a sufficient distance away from paralleling county roads to allow the county road to be bridged over the interstate. In most instances this minimum distance from the county road to the alternative was 750 to 1000 feet. Such distances provided enough distance to take a county road over the interstate without impacting that county road's intersection with another nearby county road. By keeping alternatives a minimum of 700 to 1000 feet away from the parallel county roads, the belief was that the remaining farmland divided by alternatives would not become an uneconomical remnant of property for the landowner.
- For new location alternatives, efforts were made to have alternatives cross county roads and major drainage ditches at good angles. When farmland was involved, efforts were also made to roughly parallel major drainage ditches because they tend to naturally divide farming operations.
- When new location alternatives were proceeding east to west or north to south, efforts were made to follow section lines and property lines as much as possible to eliminate the need for providing frontage roads.
- Based on the property ownership record search, the county road bridges and interchanges are located no farther apart than two miles when large individual parcels of property are divided by a new location alternative.
- A combination of parallel county roads and added frontage roads, when economically feasible and practical, was used in conjunction with the grade separation bridges and interchanges as the means of providing access to large parcels of property divided by alternatives.
- For the new location alternatives, there were human and natural environmental opportunities and constraints. There were also engineering opportunities and constraint encountered in developing the new location alternatives. Regrettably, some farmland was divided by alternatives. When this happened, the project team tried to divide the farmland in a way that did not create uneconomical remnants of property and provided reasonable access to the divided farmland.
- The frontage road concept for the new location alternatives was needed to prepare the cost estimate for the alternatives.
- For alternatives using US 61, the existing southbound lanes of US 61 would be converted to a two-lane, two-way frontage road from Merigold to the north part of Shelby in Bolivar County and from Hushpuckena in Bolivar County to the Bolivar/Coahoma County Line. From the Swan Lake/Clarksdale Airport area in

Coahoma County to the Dundee area in Tunica County, the existing northbound lanes of US 61 would be converted to a two-lane, two-way frontage road. This was used as a means to maintain traffic with minimal disruption on US 61 during the construction of I-69 for these alternatives. Should an incident occur requiring the closure of the northbound and/or southbound lanes of the interstate, this frontage road concept provides a means of detouring US 61 traffic over the frontage roads and sections of US 61 not utilized between Merigold and Dundee. The concept of utilizing one of the existing lanes of US 61 for a frontage road addresses access needs on one side of the interstate, and also provides a two-lane road for economic development. The access needs for the other side of alternatives that use US 61 was addressed in a similar manner to that of the new location alternatives.

- The frontage road concept for alternatives using US 61 was needed to prepare the cost estimate for the alternatives.

**Eastern Alternative Interchange and Connection to US 61 near Merigold Consultant Team Request Addressed by MDOT on September 24, 2003**

The Western and Central alternatives, in the Southern Section slightly north of Shaw, include a new four-lane connector from US 61 to the Litton Road Interchange. North of Cleveland, the Central Alternative has an interchange near Merigold and the four-lane crossroad at that interchange provides a Central Alternative connection to the four-lane section of US 61 between Cleveland and Merigold. The Central Alternative therefore provides a four-lane bypass of Cleveland.

Between Merigold in Bolivar County and Clarksdale in Coahoma County, the Western Alternative is located from approximately two to five miles west of US 61. Over this approximate length of 26 miles between Merigold and Clarksdale, the Western Alternative bypasses to the west the municipalities of Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville, Shelby, and Duncan in Bolivar County. Each of these municipalities are located along the US 61 corridor, and interchanges are proposed on the Western Alternative to provide direct access to Merigold, Mound Bayou, Shelby, and Duncan.

Between Merigold and Clarksdale, the Central Alternative uses the US 61 corridor and interchanges are proposed for Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville, Shelby, Duncan, and Alligator.

Between Merigold and Clarksdale, the Eastern Alternative is located from four to seven miles east of US 61. Interchanges are proposed east of Merigold, east of Shelby, west of the Roundaway community in Coahoma County, and east of the Bobo community in Coahoma County.

It is important for the north Bolivar County municipalities of Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville, Shelby, and Alligator to have good access to all I-69 alternatives. The Western and Central alternatives provide these municipalities good access. For the Eastern Alternative to address these municipalities' access needs in a comparable manner to the other two alternatives, it was decided the Eastern Alternative should include the cost of a new four-lane connector from the Merigold-Drew Road Interchange west to US 61 south of Merigold, and the cost of an interchange at US 61. The northbound traffic on the Eastern Alternative desiring to access these US 61 municipalities would then have a four-lane route from the Merigold-Drew Interchange to

Clarksdale. The Eastern Alternative would then also provide southbound traffic US 61 traffic an eastern bypass of Cleveland in a similar manner to the way the Western and Central alternatives provide northbound US 61 traffic a western bypass of Cleveland.

To fairly compare the costs of the three alternatives, for the Eastern Alternative the consultant team will consider the cost of providing the additional interchange on US 61 near Merigold and the cost of providing a four-lane connector from the added US 61 interchange to the interchange at Merigold-Drew Road.

**Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement submitted to MDOT for review on November 10, 2003**

**MDOT and FHWA Comments on Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement finalized on March 29, 2004**

**Benoit School District Superintendent Dr. Suzanne Hawley's Letter dated February 11, 2004**

Based on the meetings held in Dr. Hawley's Office at Ray Brooks School during the 2003 Calendar Year, the project team had requested the Benoit School District to provide a position statement on the SR 1 crossing alternatives undergoing study south of Benoit.

The letter from Dr. Hawley stated, "Please accept this letter as an endorsement for the I-69 Section near Benoit School District/Ray Brooks School to cross in the curve just south of the school. This route is north of the one that would cross Lake Bolivar and would take it across our 16<sup>th</sup> Section Land. We feel this would be the most beneficial to the Town of Benoit and Benoit School District. It would lie in close proximity to Benoit and any development would impact this small town and our school district. We look forward to this project moving ahead."

**Native American Conference held at the Grand Casino – Tunica Resort on February 11-13, 2004**

In accordance with the formal consultation process described in 36 CFR 800, the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) hosted this Native American Conference. For Sections of Independent Utility (SIU) # 9 and #11 of the proposed Interstate 69 (I-69), alternatives have been selected for detail engineering and environmental studies, and a Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statements has been prepared for both SIUs. The conference was directed towards the Native American tribal representatives who could possibly identify properties of importance to Native Americans, as well as properties to which one or more tribes may attach religious or cultural significance, relative to the alternatives undergoing further study. The Mississippi Division Office of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), and Tennessee Division Office of the FHWA concurred in the MDOT scheduling and hosting this conference. To provide a good cross section of representation at the conference for issues involving the natural and human environments, some Federal and State Cooperating Agencies were invited to send representation to the conference.

The attendees represented the MDOT, TDOT, Mississippi and Tennessee Division Offices of the FHWA, the consultant teams for SIU 9 and SIU 11, three Native American tribes, Mississippi State University, and some of the SIU 11 Cooperating Agencies. The three Native American

tribes represented at the First Session were: the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma; and the Chickasaw Nation. Bad weather conditions prevented the representative from the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma from attending the First Session. SIU 11 Cooperating Agencies represented at the First Session included: the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The SIU 9 consultant team representatives at the First Session were from PBS&J, while the SIU 11 consultant team representatives were from Neel-Schaffer, Inc., Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc., and Coastal Environments, Inc. Excluding the 22 representatives from the MDOT, TDOT, FHWA, and consultant teams, 13 people attended the First Session. The minutes for the meeting are contained in the **Appendix**.

The main concern expressed by the Native Americans at the Conference and on the field visit was the area adjacent to US 61 in the vicinity of the US 49 intersection at Lula. It was agreed at the Conference that the consultant team would review and refine the alternatives, if necessary, near this intersection. It was also agreed the consultant team would provide the Native Americans with a copy of the alternative mapping for the alternatives undergoing study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

During this meeting, representatives from Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided MDOT with a draft report on EPA's preliminary evaluation of alternatives. The EPA document screened the preliminary alternatives based on environmental impacts, using GIS data, and identified alternatives that appeared to have the fewest environmental impacts overall. The assessment did not consider archaeological impacts since that information was not available at the time. It appeared that MDOT's evaluation of alternatives was consistent with EPA's, considering that the alternatives and data had been refined during MDOT's evaluation. In general, the alternatives ranked lowest by the EPA had been eliminated, and those ranked highest had been retained.

#### **MDOT and FHWA Comments on Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement finalized on March 29, 2004**

#### **Tunica, Coahoma, and Bolivar counties Archaeological Finds, Adjustment in Alternative made in April of 2004**

Coastal Environments discovered 43 previously unrecorded archaeological sites impacted by alternatives in portions of these three counties, and recommended 15 of these for avoidance, if possible. The adjustments that Neel-Schaffer made avoided most of the 15 sites. As part of the adjustments, Neel-Schaffer refined the alternatives near the US 61 intersection with US 49 at Lula to address the concerns expressed by the Native Americans at the Conference on February 11-13, 2004.